THE BIBLE OF BOXING

The Ring

EXCLUSIVE: MIKE TYSON REVIEWS HEAVYWEIGHT HISTORY

FACING TYSON

THE LEGACY OF CUS D'AMATO

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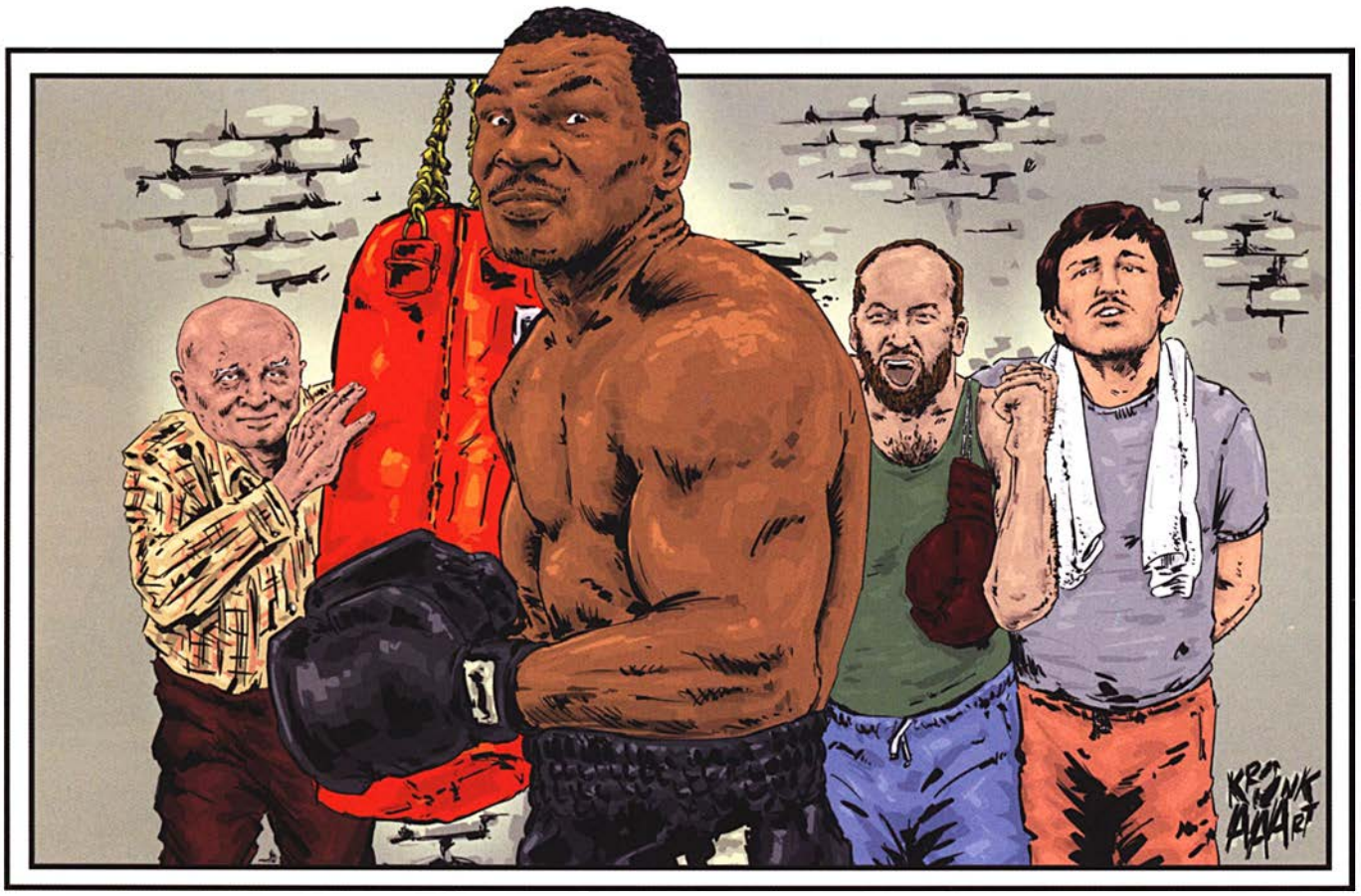

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Young Mike Tyson's trainer-mentors (left to right): Cus D'Amato, Kevin Rooney and Teddy Atlas. Illustration by KronkAAArt.

OPENING SHOT

During a WBC convention in late 1988 in Mexico City, then-undisputed heavyweight champion Mike Tyson and promoter Don King share a rare quiet moment.

RODOLFO DEL PERCIO/AFP

Tyson's second-round TKO of Trevor Berbick sparked a new generation of fight fans.

MIKE TYSON

We asked our Twitter followers to share their thoughts and memories of Tyson for this issue of The Ring. Here are some of their responses:

My favorite memory of Tyson is when a friend and I (just underage) managed to sneak into a local bar to see the next-day broadcast of his spectacular championship win vs. Trevor Berbick, who, incidentally, astonished me with his bravery at the closing knockdown with the U.K. commentator screaming "it's like watching a child in a playpen" as he crashed around the ring. Anyway, my memory of this is that I actually fell completely into silence as I witnessed this, my thoughts immediately turning to my father, his father and his father – none of whom had been fortunate to witness what I had: the youngest-ever heavyweight champ in history. An amazing moment that lives long in my memory.

Kevin Carberry
Falkirk, Scotland

I've been lucky enough to have met and spoken with Mike Tyson several times throughout my career, but the first time may have been the most memorable. November 1989 in Las Vegas at Caesars Palace for the press conference a couple days before the Julio Cesar Chavez-Sammy Fuentes title fight on HBO. I was with my trainer and a stablemate when we ran into Tyson and asked if we could take a picture. I vividly remember right before the person snapped the shot Mike went to put his arm around my shoulder but ended up inadvertently hitting me on the side of my head with a half-closed fist, and I'll never forget how quickly and sincerely he apologized to me. It was instant.

Afterward, the guys with me were all talking about how nice Mike was and how they didn't expect him to be as down to earth as he was.

"Iceman" John Scully
Former light heavyweight contender

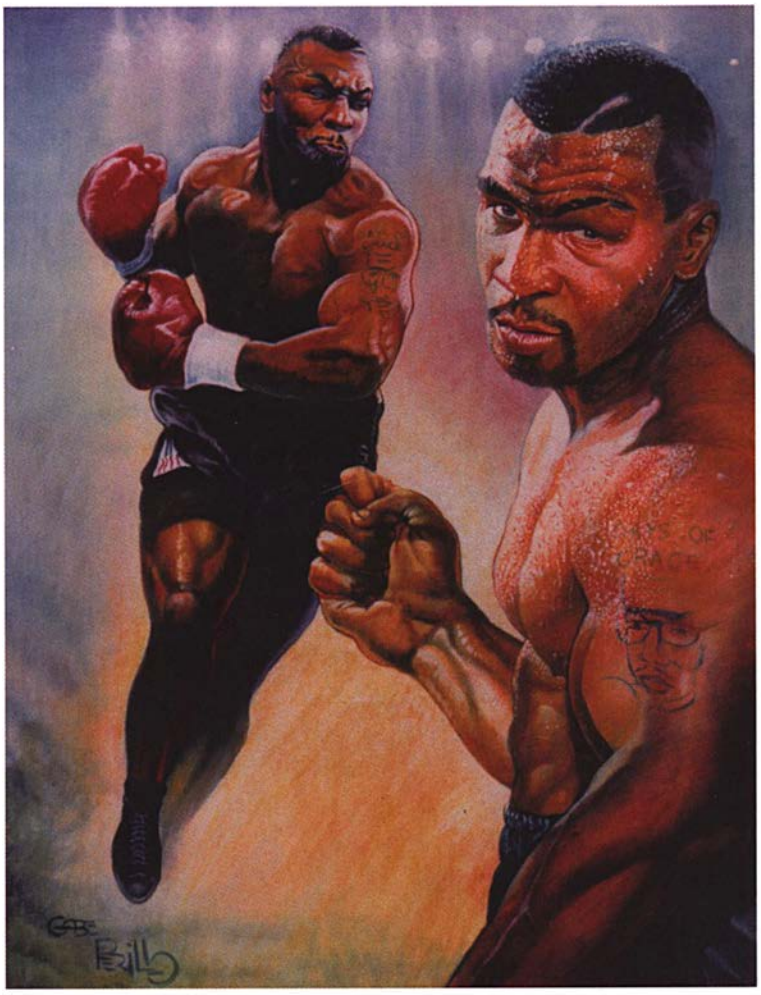
Any boxing fan knows the heavyweight champion of one's childhood holds a special place in one's memories. Until my grandfather's dying day, he spoke of Joe Louis' title reign with the same kind of reverence evident in my dad's voice when he reminisces of Rocky Marciano. Older cousins tell me about Muhammad Ali with admiration that equals my sophomore history teacher's love of JFK. And when I reflect on Mike Tyson's time as king of boxing's glamour division, I now recognize just how awesome it was that my childhood

coincided with the spectacular prime of The Baddest Man on the Planet.

I got to witness the meteoric rise of the youngest fighter to ever win a world heavyweight title. I was there for the transformation from the polite, fan-friendly knockout artist Kid Dynamite into the fearsome, crude destroyer Iron Mike. The discussions on my schoolyard playground included debates over whether or not the seemingly invincible peak Mike Tyson would have beaten any heavyweight champion in history. It was an exciting time to be a kid in love with boxing.

Later on, the most disturbing truths of Tyson's inevitable downfall cast a troubling shadow over both his career and his character. It would be irresponsible to ignore those aspects of his story. However, I'm thankful I was there to experience the Tyson phenomenon in the early stages before it all fell apart, before fans had to reckon with the greater moral questions of Mike Tyson's ongoing popularity in spite of his various transgressions. When I was a kid, Tyson was popular because he was a once-in-a-lifetime kind of fighter. No more. No less. And that was enough.

Bruce Dixon
Rockford, Tenn.



Art by the late Gabe Perillo, a former amateur boxer who painted more than 15 covers for The Ring from 1969-1979.

When Tyson was at his marauding best, we were spoiled by having boxing on terrestrial TV in England. We got regular glimpses of Tyson on the way up on the weekly Saturday show, *ITV World of Sport*.

I was 15 at the time of the Tyson-Spinks fight and I stayed up for it. Due to the time difference, the main event started at around 4 a.m. Viewers in the U.K. were getting the bulk of the fight card for free when it was a PPV fight in the States. Prior to Tyson coming out to strut his stuff, a heavyweight prospect named Mike Williams fought a certain James "Buster" Douglas. It stuck in my memory as Douglas scored knockdowns with his jab! I hadn't seen anyone do that since Larry Holmes!

After an interminable delay, which we later found out was caused by Spinks' team pulling strokes behind the scenes (Spinks' manager, Butch Lewis, reportedly took issue with Tyson's hand wraps), we saw the challenger come out. The commentary team in the U.K. was the impressive Reg Gutteridge and Jim Watt, who remarked that Spinks looked "cool." He certainly seemed to show confidence as he made his way to the ring.

Tyson's ringwalk followed, and there was sinister music playing; I felt a shiver with the combination of the music and the image of Tyson edging closer to the ring. Any thoughts I had that Spinks may have had a chance in the fight evaporated at that point. This was reinforced when they showed Spinks in the ring once Tyson had arrived. He now looked terrified, and he kept his robe on rather than warm up.

As we all know, the fight was over in a flash. Gutteridge said in the seconds following the knockout that this version of the champion was about 50 percent of what Tyson himself thought he was going to become. Little did we know at that point that we had seen the best of Tyson and his skills and performances would deteriorate from this point.

I went to school the next day and my friends initially didn't believe Tyson had won in one round when I told them. Bear in mind that there was a lot of clamor for Spinks. A lot of people (including myself) thought he had a shot. They would watch the replay that evening to find out I was telling the truth!

Paul Wickes
Bath, England

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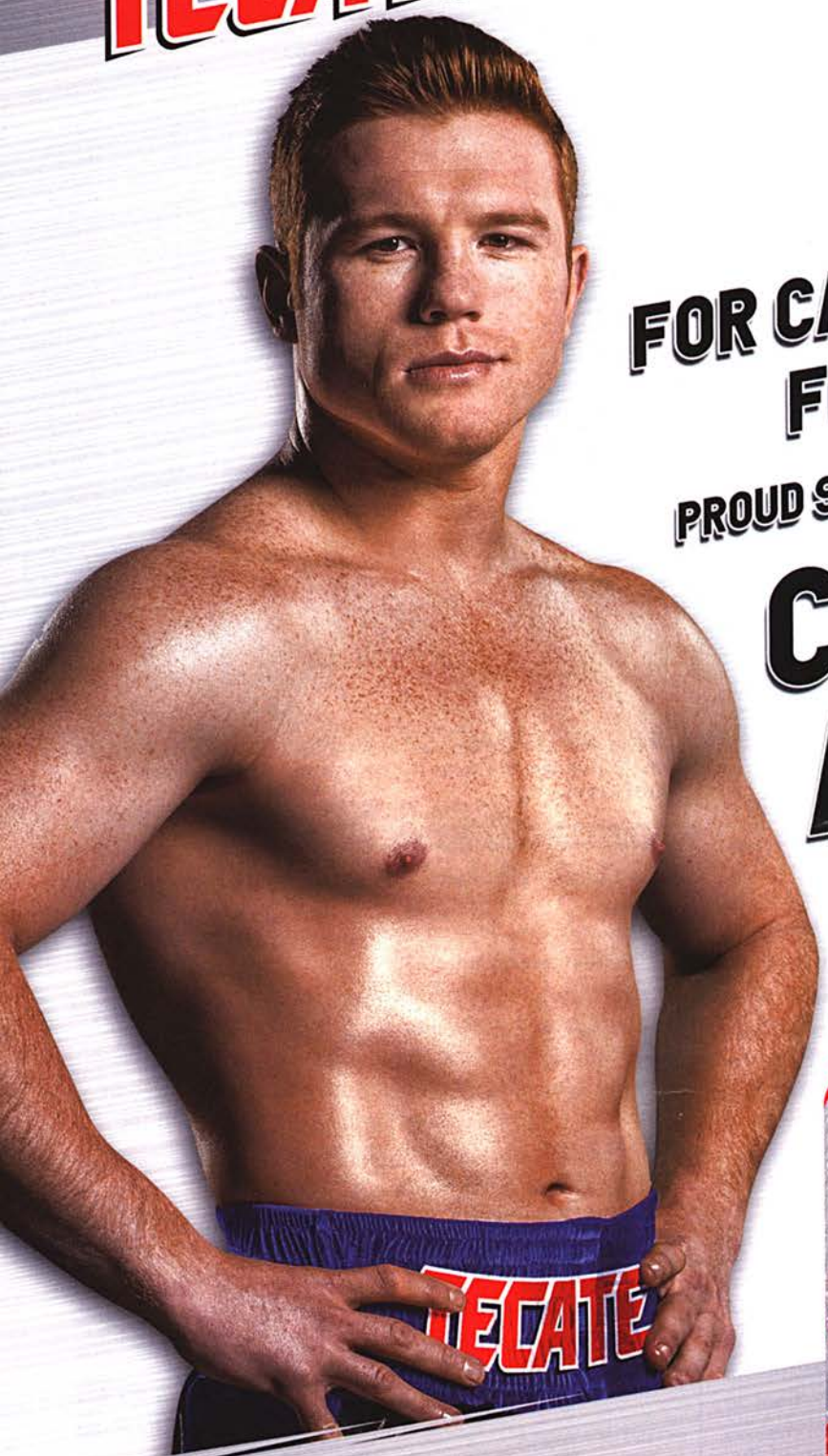

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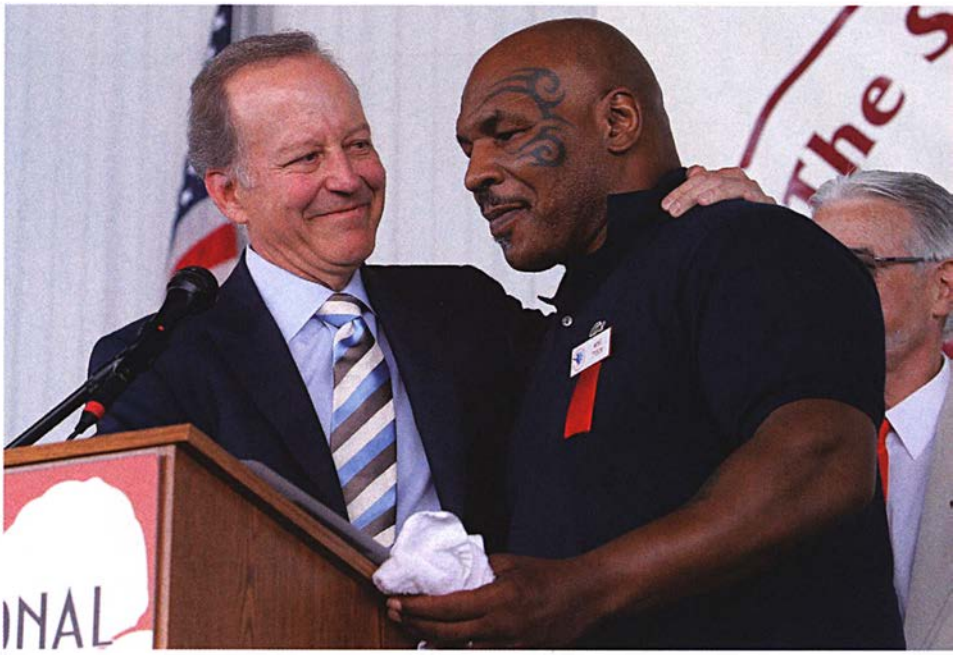
RINGSIDE BY JIM GRAY

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE AMAZING



Tyson and Gray at the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2018.

Mike Tyson. His name and his image invoke many thoughts. Everything that has happened in his life is beyond what anyone could have imagined.

If you meet him, you never forget it. That was the case with me.

It was in the early 1980s, and Mike was just starting his career. I was at a restaurant in Los Angeles with my Dad when he introduced himself. He ended up sitting down and talking to us for about 15 minutes. Little did we know that this very casual meeting would be the beginning of our nearly four-decade relationship.

I was very fortunate to have covered Mike in the early part of his career, to get to know him before he became the youngest heavyweight champion in boxing history. I saw the evolution of the prodigy who became a worldwide icon. He was a devastating force in the ring, and his performances made him a global household name. He was the baddest man on the planet. He was prolific and he earned it. He became Iron Mike, carried the sport on his shoulders and took us all for a ride unlike any before. Boxing made him, but it nearly destroyed him too.

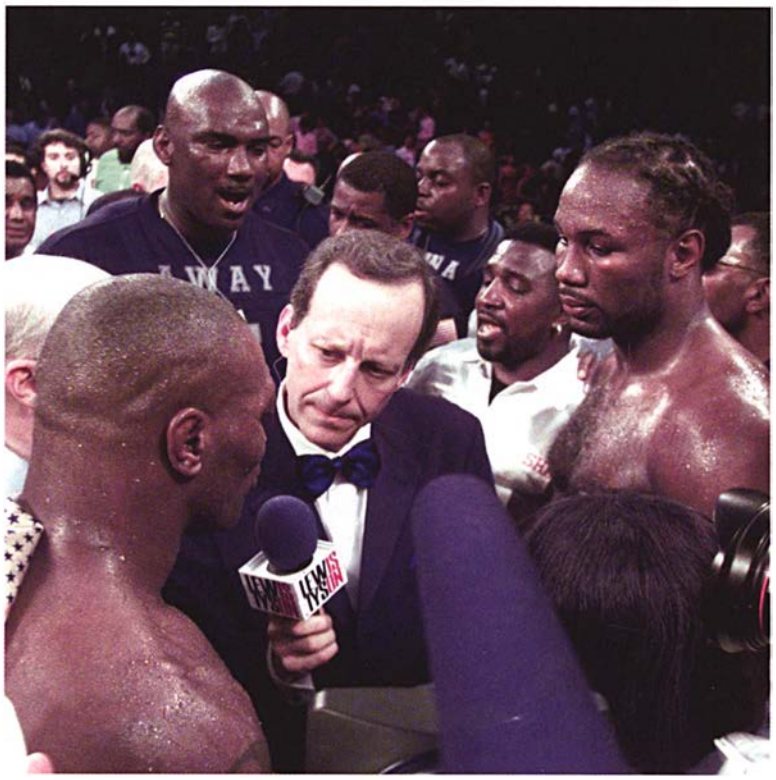
I saw Tyson from all sides, including the good, the bad, the amazing, the awful, and his crash and fall upon his conviction. He had rage and anger, yet I also witnessed countless acts of kindness and genuine humility. Many times, his horrible behavior made you wonder what he was doing or thinking. But he could also display a depth of knowledge that few on the planet possess, that enables him to recount historical world events or recite, verbatim, literature that show how well-read and versed he is on so many topics.

I experienced all of Mike's swings. From threatening to kill me, to kissing me on my cheek 45 seconds later. And quite frankly, I am still not sure which was more disturbing. I am a member of the Showtime Championship Boxing broadcast team, and we televised many of Tyson's iconic fights. We saw him achieve great heights and hit unimaginable lows. But one fight is indelible. The evening he fought Evander Holyfield for the second time and bit his earlobe is a night that will never escape my memory.

While at his worst professional moment, and one of the most deplorable in the sport's history, Mike Tyson, with a gash over his eye that was so deep you could see all the way to his skull, stopped and did the post-fight interview with me. No one does that. When a rare event of this magnitude happens, the principal usually hides and the incident is handled by their public relations team, or a statement is released a few days later. But Tyson stood there and answered the questions. I will never forget that.

In my upcoming book, *Talking to GOATs,* I write about so many of my experiences with Mike. What he is really like, and how it's been to spend time with him over the years. What we all have learned is that Mike Tyson is a very complicated man, whose life has been like a constant roller coaster, full of turmoil and triumph.

Tyson's existence has been an evolution, and yet his journey is not complete. He is still seeking to improve, grow and be a better person. He extends himself to others and expects nothing in return. He appears more mellow now, but you never know when something might set him off. In many ways, that is what attracts us to him. In a world of political correctness, Mike is unpredictable. He will tell you how he feels and what's on his mind and doesn't even think of the consequences. With Iron Mike, you have no idea what will come next. He can be marvelous, but in an instant he can also be perilous.



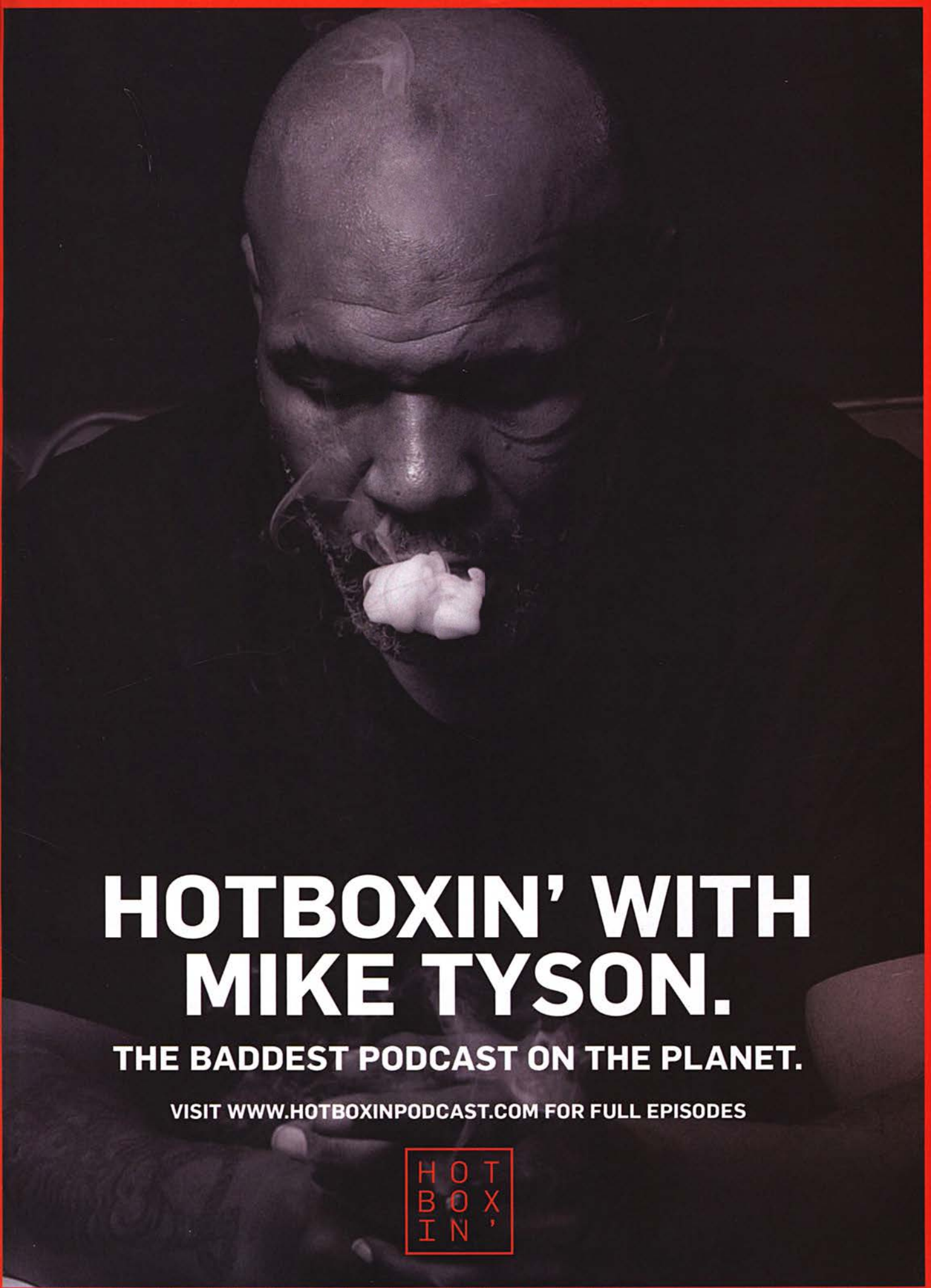
Gray has interviewed Tyson immediately after his ring highs and lows.

When Tyson was on top, he lived his life the way he wanted to live it. He was exhilarating in the ring, while also displaying a perplexing and compelling personality. Being at a Tyson fight was an event unlike any other. He captured the attention of the world. Boxing hasn't seen anything like Mike since he retired. During his reign, he went through a ton of money and lived a reckless lifestyle. He played by his rules. And he paid the price for his behavior. It cost him his title, his money, his freedom and his reputation. Through it all, he tells me he does have some regrets, but they are few. He has tried to learn from all of the mistakes and missteps he has taken. He wants to be better tomorrow than he was yesterday. He takes responsibility for his actions and doesn't blame anyone.

The Mike many people don't get to see is the guy who's charming, caring, giving and considerate. My experience is that he is a loyal friend, the kind you can count on in good times and bad.

When Mike introduced me at my induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, I knew I would not be there if it weren't for him. Through the countless interviews we did, those that are replayed millions upon millions of times, I was so fortunate to have been able to stand next to Mike at his best and most glorious moments. Looking back, there were also times when I questioned him at his worst, in moments that would become infamous. I don't agree with or condone some of what he's done in the past. And, I would not dare try and look into a crystal ball to predict his future. That would be foolish. But I do know this. I am grateful and most appreciative that Mike Tyson has taken me, and all of us, on this very strange, bumpy, incredible and exhilarating ride.

Jim Gray is a 12-time Emmy Award-winning sportscaster. He is a member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame and has been honored by the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.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'IRON' MIKE TYSON

1985

MARCH 6, 1985

TKO 1 MERCEDES

TKO 1 SINGLETON, KO 4 HALPIN, TKO 1 SPAIN, RTD 2 ALDERSON

KO 3 SIMS, KO 1 CANADY, KO 1 JOHNSON, TKO 1 LONG

MAY 3, 1986

KO 1 COLAY, TKO 1 BENJAMIN, KO 1 RICHARDSON, TKO 2 NELSON

UD 10 TILLIS

TKO 1 SCAFF, TKO 1 YOUNG, TKO 1 JACO, TKO 5 JAMESON, TKO 6 FERGUSON, KO 3 ZOUSKI

MAY 20, 1986

UD 10 GREEN

TKO 1 GROSS, KO 1 HOSEA, KO 2 BOYD

JULY 26, 1986

TKO 1 FRAZIER, TKO 10 RIBALTA, TKO 2 RATLIFF

TKO 2 BERBICK

NOVEMBER 22, 1986

UD 12 SMITH

TKO 6 THOMAS

MARCH 7, 1987

AUGUST 1, 1987

UD 12 TUCKER

JANUARY 22, 1988

TKO 7 BIGGS

TKO 4 HOLMES

TKO 2 TUBBS

JUNE 27, 1988

KO 1 SPINKS

TKO 5 BRUNO, TKO 1 WILLIAMS

FEBRUARY 11, 1990

KO 1 TILLMAN, TKO 1 STEWART, TKO 7 RUDDOCK

L KO 10 DOUGLAS

JUNE 28, 1991

UD 12 RUDDOCK (2)

DQ 1 MCNEELY

KO 3 MATHIS JR., TKO 3 BRUNO (2), TKO 1 SELDON

AUGUST 19, 1995

NOVEMBER 9, 1996

L TKO 11 HOLYFIELD

L DQ 3 HOLYFIELD (2)

JUNE 28, 1997

JANUARY 16, 1999

KO 5 BOTHA

NC NORRIS, TKO 2 FRANCIS, TKO 1 SAVARESE, NC GOLOTA, RTD 6 NIELSEN

JUNE 8, 2002

L KO 8 LEWIS

JUNE 11, 2005

KO 1 ETIENNE, L KO 4 WILLIAMS

L RTD 6 MCBRIDE

2005

50 WINS
44 KO'S
6 LOSSES
2 NC

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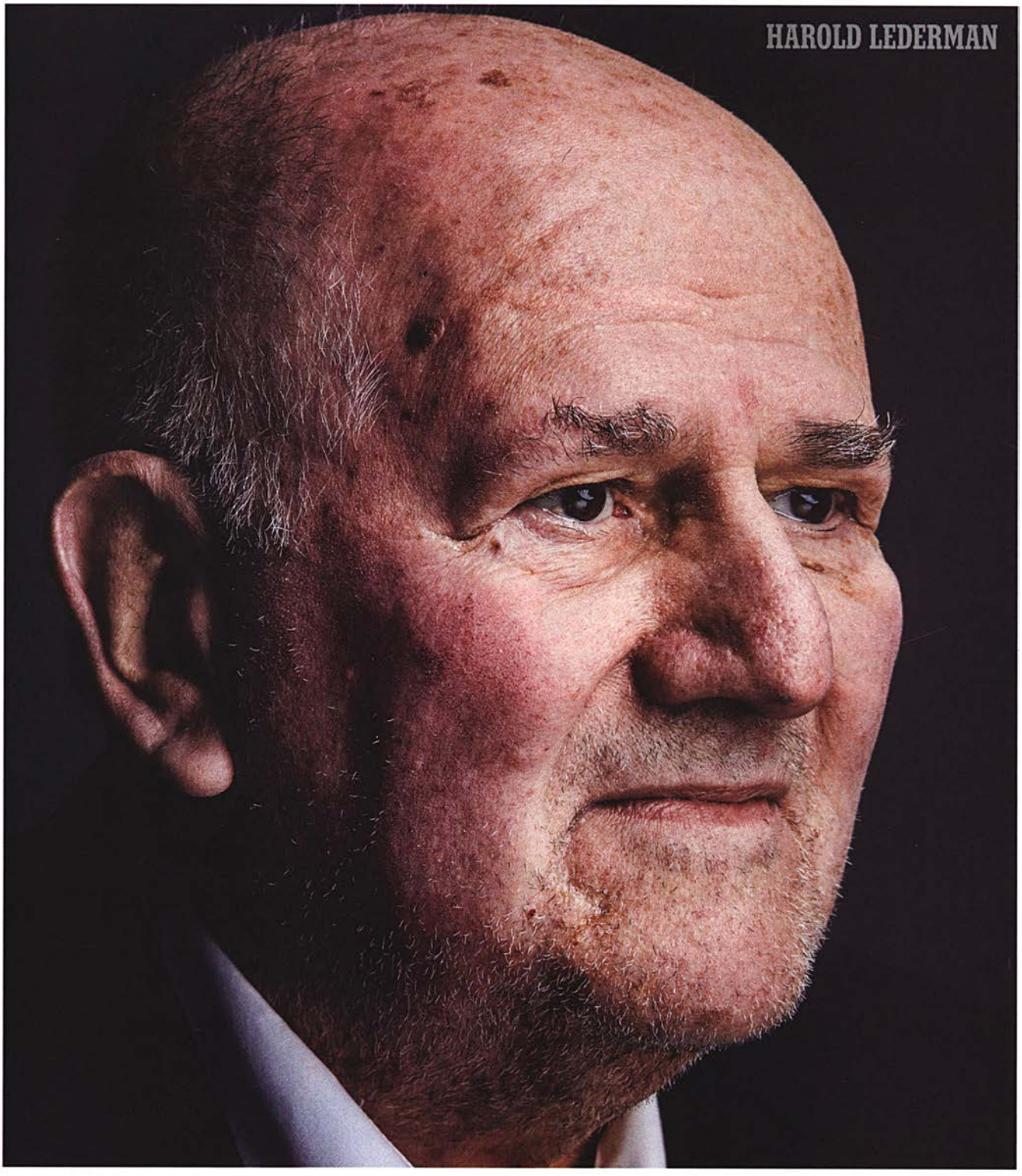


THE FACE OF BOXING

MIKE TYSON ON HBO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**
TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

Mike Tyson fought on HBO 17 times. The first of these outings was against Mitch Green on May 20, 1986. Then, after four fights on other outlets, he returned to the cable giant to face Jose Ribalta.

"We were nearing the end of this incredible run with Ray Leonard,

Marvin Hagler, Roberto Duran and Tommy Hearns," Larry Merchant recalls. "You thought it couldn't possibly get bigger. And then Tyson came along."

The years that followed saw Tyson at his peak as he obliterated Alfonzo Ratliff, Trevor Berbick, James Smith, Pinklon Thomas, Tony Tucker, Tyrell Biggs, Larry Holmes, Tony Tubbs, Michael Spinks, Frank Bruno and Carl Williams – all on HBO. Iron Mike was touted in some circles as "the greatest heavyweight of all time." Then he traveled to Tokyo for a humbling date with destiny against James "Buster" Douglas. Comeback fights on HBO against Henry Tillman and Alex Stewart followed, after which Don King brought Mike to Showtime. Tyson appeared on HBO only once after that – on a pay-per-view bout against Lennox Lewis that was televised jointly with Showtime in 2002.

Larry Merchant's first fight for HBO was in 1978. He was on the air for all of HBO's Tyson telecasts.

Harold Lederman made his HBO debut two months before Tyson-Green. The network decided against sending him to Tokyo for Tyson-Tubbs and Tyson-Douglas because they were expensive trips and neither encounter was expected to be competitive. Other than that, Lederman was at ringside for all of Tyson's HBO fights.

Barry Tompkins was the blow-by-blow commentator for Tyson's first eight bouts (through Tyson-Holmes) on HBO. Then Jim Lampley – who had called Mike's fights against Jesse Ferguson, James Tillis and Marvis Frazier for ABC – took over.

Ray Leonard was the expert analyst for most of Tyson's HBO contests.

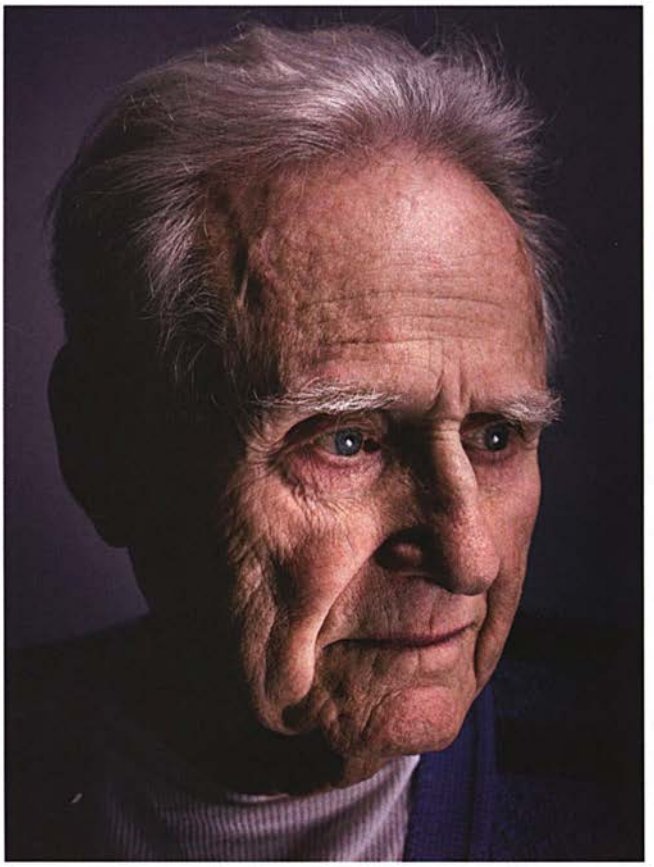
The Lampley-Merchant-Lederman combination is the one that fight fans remember best from the Mike Tyson era on HBO.

"These photographs were taken on three different days," Wojtek Urbanek remembers. "Harold was the first, and it was very sad for me. I knew he wasn't well. When I focused on his face, I saw someone who was very kind but also someone who knew that the end of the journey was near.

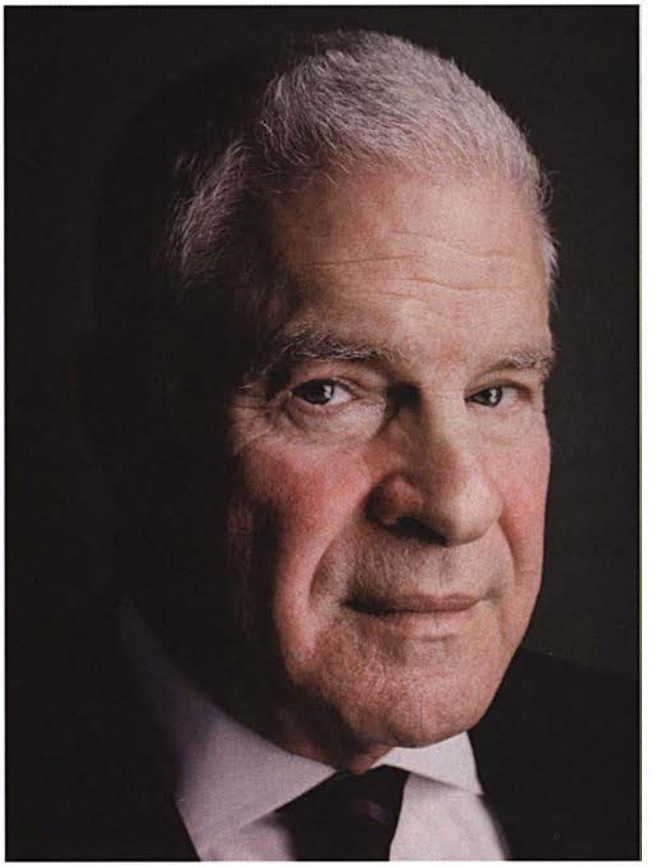
"Jim was polite but very guarded. He wanted to present himself in a certain way, and the suggestions I made to him didn't matter. It felt like I was photographing a movie star who was very media savvy and wanted to project a certain image.

"Larry's eyes were amazing to me. They're the eyes of someone who has seen so much and understands what he has seen and has gone through life with a strong sense of right and wrong. They're the eyes of someone you can trust." RING

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.



LARRY MERCHANT



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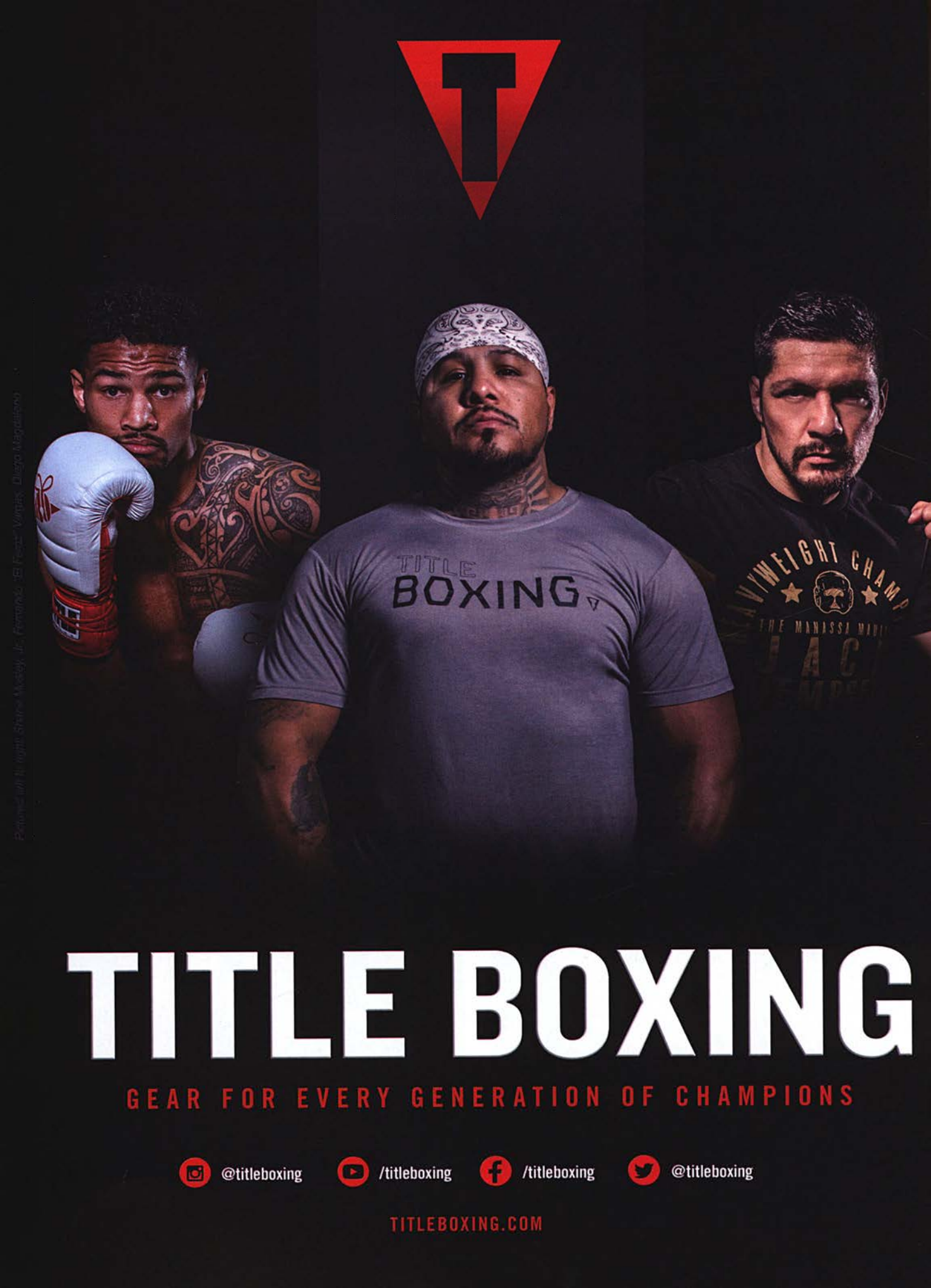

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RATINGS

The Ring Ratings through fights of June 20, 2020

Naoya Inoue, No. 3 in the pound-for-pound rankings, has collected every major world title (Ring, WBC, WBA, IBF, WBO) during reigns in three divisions.

1 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)

3 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

4 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)

5 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)

6 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)

9 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC
U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)

1 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO
U.K. • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)

2 **DILLIAN WHYTE**
U.K. • 27-1-0 (18 KOs)

3 **DEONTAY WILDER**
U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)

4 **LUIS ORTIZ**
Cuba • 31-2-0 (26 KOs)

5 **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)

6 **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
Russia • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)

7 **JOSEPH PARKER**
New Zealand • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)

8 **MICHAEL HUNTER**
U.S. • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)

9 **OSCAR RIVAS**
Colombia • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)

10 **KUBRAT PULEV**
Bulgaria • 28-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **MAIRIS BRIEDIS**
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 **YUNIEL DORTICOS** IBF
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC
Congo • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)

4 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

5 **KEVIN LERENA**
S. Africa • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 **ANDREW TABITI**
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

7 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE**
U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

8 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** WBA
France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)

9 **THABISO MCHUNU**
S. Africa • 22-5-0 (13 KOs)

10 **MICHAL CIESLAK**
Poland • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA
Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

3 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)

4 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
Colombia • 25-1-0 (13 KOs)

5 **JEAN PASCAL**
Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)

6 **BADOU JACK**
Sweden • 22-3-3 (13 KOs)

7 **MARCUS BROWNE**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

8 **JOE SMITH JR.**
U.S. • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)

9 **DOMINIC BOESEL**
Germany • 30-1-0 (12 KOs)

10 **ANTHONY YARDE**
U.K. • 19-1-0 (18 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **CALLUM SMITH** RING, WBA
U.K. • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** WBC
U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

2 **CALEB PLANT** IBF
U.S. • 20-0-0 (12 KOs)

3 **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)

4 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

5 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** WBO
U.K. • 29-0-0 (14 KOs)

6 **CALEB TRUAX**
U.S. • 31-4-2 (19 KOs)

7 **JOHN RYDER**
U.K. • 28-5-0 (16 KOs)

8 **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
Russia • 22-2-0 (15 KOs)

9 **DAVID LEMIEUX**
Canada • 41-4-0 (34 KOs)

10 **DANIEL JACOBS**
U.S. • 36-3-0 (30 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of June 20, 2020

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA — Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF — Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO — U.S. • 29-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC — U.S. • 30-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** — Ukraine • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** — Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **KAMIL SZEREMETA** — Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **7** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** — U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **8** **MACIEJ SULECKI** — Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **ROB BRANT** — U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **LIAM WILLIAMS** — U.K. • 22-2-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JERMELL CHARLO** WBC — U.S. • 33-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **JEISON ROSARIO** IBF, WBA — Dom. Rep. • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **3** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** — U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **4** **JARRETT HURD** — U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **ERISLANDY LARA** — Cuba • 26-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **6** **BRIAN CASTANO** — Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **7** **TONY HARRISON** — U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO** — France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **ERICKSON LUBIN** — U.S. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **PATRICK TEIXEIRA** WBO — Brazil • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC — U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO — U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** WBA — Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN** — U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER** — U.S. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA** — U.S. • 36-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **YORDENIS UGAS** — Cuba • 25-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV** — Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SERGEY LIPINETS** — Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **MIKEY GARCIA** — U.S. • 40-1-0 (30 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA — U.K. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** WBC, WBO — U.S. • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS** — U.S. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)
- **3** **IVAN BARANCHYK** — Russia • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL** — Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **KIRYL RELIKH** — Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **6** **MAURICE HOOKER** — U.S. • 27-1-3 (18 KOs)
- **7** **JOSE ZEPEDA** — U.S. • 31-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **8** **MARIO BARRIOS** — U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **ARNOLD BARBOZA** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **BATYRZHAN JUKEMBAYEV** — Kazakhstan • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)

Demetrius Andrade has yet to land a major fight, but he has climbed to No. 2 at middleweight.

Jeison Rosario crashed the junior middleweight rankings by upsetting Julian Williams in January.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** RING, WBA, WBO — Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** IBF — U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC — U.S. • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **RICHARD COMMEY** — Ghana • 29-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **LUKE CAMPBELL** — U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA** — U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **ROBERT EASTER** — U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA** — Dom. Rep. • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **JORGE LINARES** — Venezuela • 47-5-0 (29 KOs)
- **9** **EMMANUEL TAGOE** — Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **RANCES BARTHELEMY** — Cuba • 27-1-1 (14 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

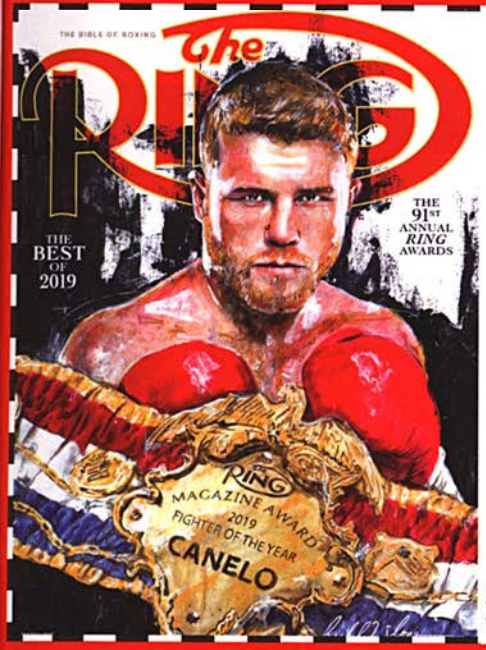
- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** WBC — Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** IBF — U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **JAMEL HERRING** WBO — U.S. • 21-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **TEVIN FARMER** — U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- **5** **RENE ALVARADO** — Nicaragua • 32-8-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **MASAYUKI ITO** — Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **ANDREW CANCIO** — U.S. • 21-5-2 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MIGUEL ROMAN** — Mexico • 62-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** — Russia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **CHRIS COLBERT** — U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JOSH WARRINGTON** IBF — U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC — U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **XU CAN** WBA — China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **4** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBO — U.S. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **5** **KID GALAHAD** — U.K. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **MARK MAGSAYO** — Phil. • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **7** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** — Mongolia • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **JESSIE MAGDALENO** — U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **9** **RUBEN VILLA** — U.S. • 18-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **MIGUEL MARRIAGA** — Colombia • 29-3-0 (25 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **REY VARGAS** WBC — Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO — Mexico • 31-1-0 (27 KOs)
- **3** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA — Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **4** **DANIEL ROMAN** — U.S. • 27-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOSUKE IWASA** — Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **BRANDON FIGUEROA** — U.S. • 20-0-1 (15 KOs)
- **7** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** — Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **8** **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA** — Japan • 21-2-2 (14 KOs)
- **9** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN** — Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **STEPHEN FULTON** — U.S. • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)



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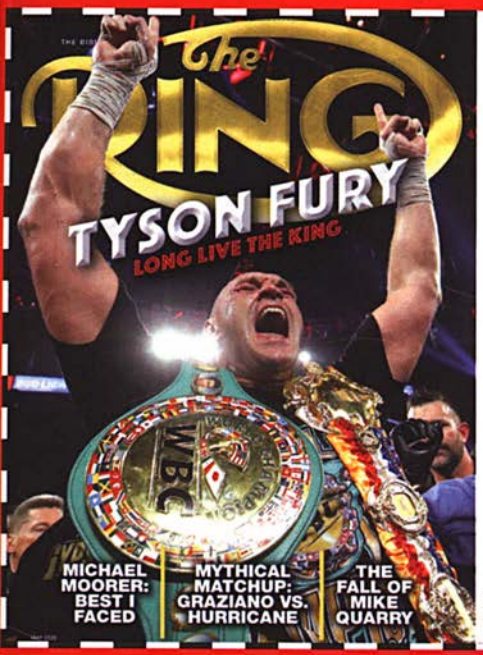

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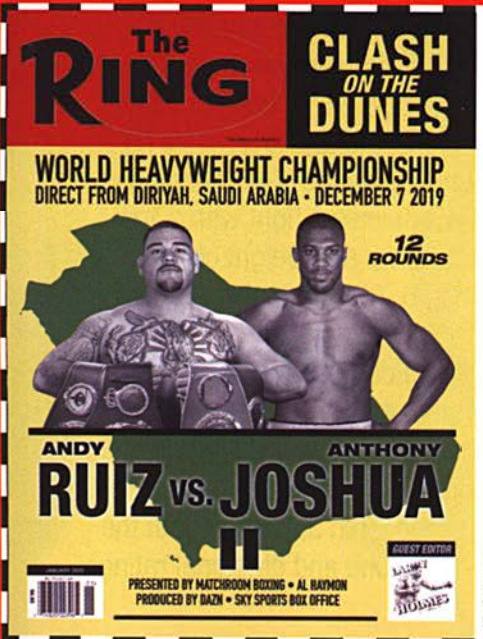

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RATINGS

Through fights of June 20, 2020

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE**
  Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **NORDINE OUBAALI** WBC
  France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Philippines • 29-4–0 (20 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ZOLANI TETE**
  S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 20-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **8** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **OSCAR NEGRETE**
  U.S. • 19-2-2 (7 KOs)
- **10** **MIKE PLANIA**
  Philippines • 24-1–0 (12 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBC
  Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** WBA
  Nicaragua • 49-2-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 25-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **KHALID YAFAI**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **JEYVIER CINTRON**
  P.R. • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **9** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **10** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 16-1-2 (8 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KOSEI TANAKA**
  Japan • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **MORUTI MTHALANE** IBF
  S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **3** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **5** **CHARLIE EDWARDS**
  U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW SELBY**
  U.K. • 13-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **7** **MASAYUKI KURODA**
  Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **8** **JUNTO NAKATANI**
  Japan • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **9** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 29-5-0 (20 KOs)
- **10** **GIEMEL MAGRAMO**
  Phil. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3** **CARLOS CANIZALES**
  Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
  Mexico • 17-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TETSUYA HISADA**
  Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO**
  Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **SHO KIMURA**
  Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)
- **9** **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 11-0-2 (6 KOs)
- **10** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

No. 4-rated featherweight Shakur Stevenson was among the few who saw action in June, knocking out Felix Caraballo in the sixth round.

Four-division titleholder Kazuto Ioka is No. 3 in the loaded junior bantamweight division.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** WBC
  Thailand • 54-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **4** **BYRON ROJAS**
  Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 20-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
  Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **SIMPIWE KONKCO**
  S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **8** **PEDRO TADURAN** IBF
  Phil. • 14-2-1 (11 KOs)
- **9** **DANIEL VALLADARES**
  Mexico • 22-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **10** **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
  Phil. • 15-2-0 (9 KOs)

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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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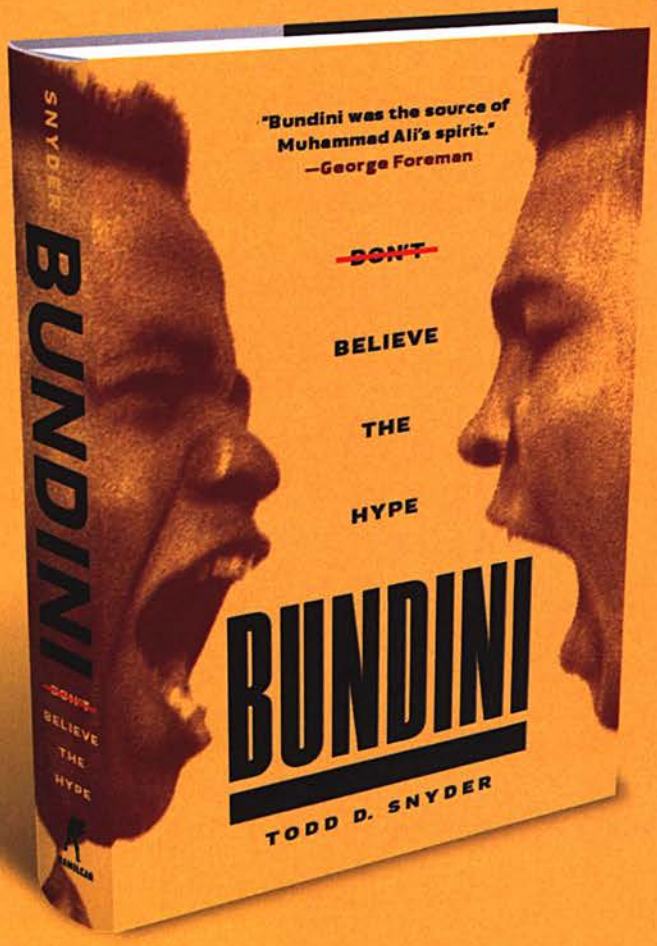

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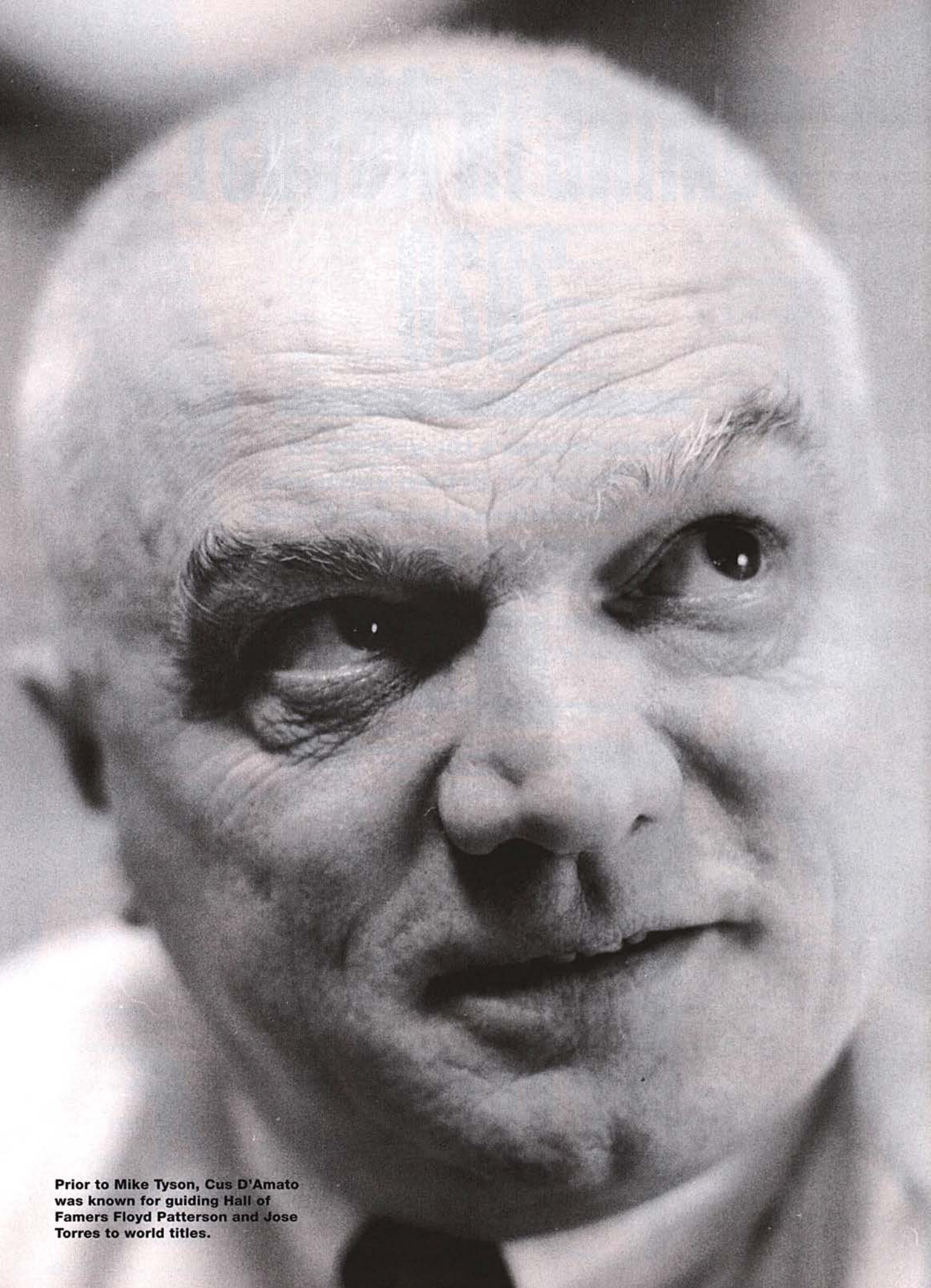
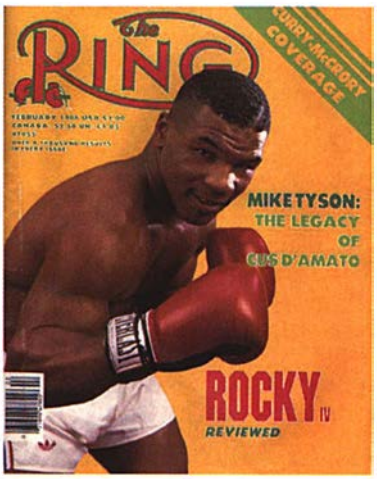


Prior to Mike Tyson, Cus D'Amato was known for guiding Hall of Famers Floyd Patterson and Jose Torres to world titles.

MIKE TYSON: THE LEGACY OF CUS D'AMATO

SHAKEN BY THE DEATH OF HIS MENTOR, TYSON CONTINUES HIS QUEST FOR THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

BY NIGEL COLLINS



EDITOR'S NOTE: This feature originally appeared in the February 1986 issue of The Ring Magazine.

Mike Tyson was sitting in a dark room watching a videotape of Jack Johnson when a visitor arrived and suggested they watch a tape of Mike's 10-month career next. It didn't take long. Since his professional debut on March 6, 1985, Tyson has captured the imagination of the boxing world by streaking to 13 consecutive knockouts – and still counting. Nine of his victims have exited in the opening round. And while the debate continues as to whether he is a legend in the making or just another built-up palooka who'll fall apart the first time he faces a top-notch fighter, nobody is accusing Mike Tyson of being dull.

Tyson watched the tape impassively, and for the most part refrained from comment. One victory (over Donnie Long) was judged particularly pleasing because "everybody said he would give me trouble," and another because "I heard he was a cop." But as most of the knockouts flickered by, Mike was mute. In the time honored tradition of strong, silent men from Samson to Sylvester Stallone, he let his fists do the talking.

There is somewhat of a comic book quality about Tyson's fights. When he hits opponents, they don't just fall or slump to the mat. They fly across the ring, often bouncing off the floor or ropes before crashing to the canvas. It's a little like watching Popeye belt Brutus, or Batman plaster the Penguin. The violence is so exaggerated, it seems slightly surreal.

The spectacular manner in which Tyson disposes of his ring adversaries is not the only thing that makes him something out of the ordinary. Mike looks more like an NFL fullback than a fighter. He is 220 pounds of muscle crammed into a 5-foot-11 frame. His 19½-inch neck is larger than any heavyweight champion's this side of Primo Carnera. He is, in a way, boxing's equivalent of William (The Refrigerator) Perry – sans fat. And he's only 19 years old.

But numbers, whether they relate to knockouts or biceps, are not the stuff that legends are made of. No, what makes Tyson something special is his lasting relationship with the late Cus D'Amato. It is the story of how

TALE OF THE TAPE: THE MIKE TYSON CHRONOLOGY

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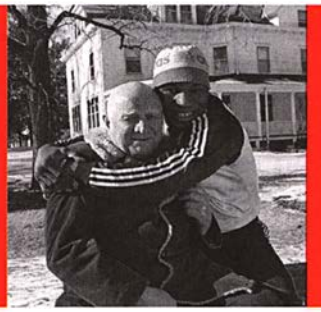
NOV. 4, 1985 »
Cus D'Amato dies of pneumonia.



D'Amato took a troubled young man under his wing, delivered him from the mean streets of New York City's Brownsville section and gave him an opportunity to fulfill his destiny. A destiny that D'Amato was positive would lead to the heavyweight championship of the world.

However, the road to sport's greatest prize is not paved by wise old men anxious to pass on their knowledge. D'Amato could only show the protégé of his waning years the path to glory. Mike had to do the fighting. And fight he has, averaging a match every couple of weeks since his pro debut.

Tyson's whirlwind march through the John Does of the heavyweight division was hardly interrupted by the recent death of D'Amato. Although Mike was one of Cus' pallbearers, he was back in the ring a week after the funeral.

"I don't know who made up the saying, but 'the show must go on,'" said Mike softly. "That's what Cus believed."

Nevertheless, D'Amato's death was a staggering blow, one that still brings a quiver to Mike's voice when he speaks of his beloved mentor.

"Cus was more than a father to me. Anyone can be a father and it doesn't really mean anything. Cus was my backbone. I'm not over it (D'Amato's death) at all. The things we practiced (in the gym) for years and years . . . now I'm starting to do them and he's not around to see it.

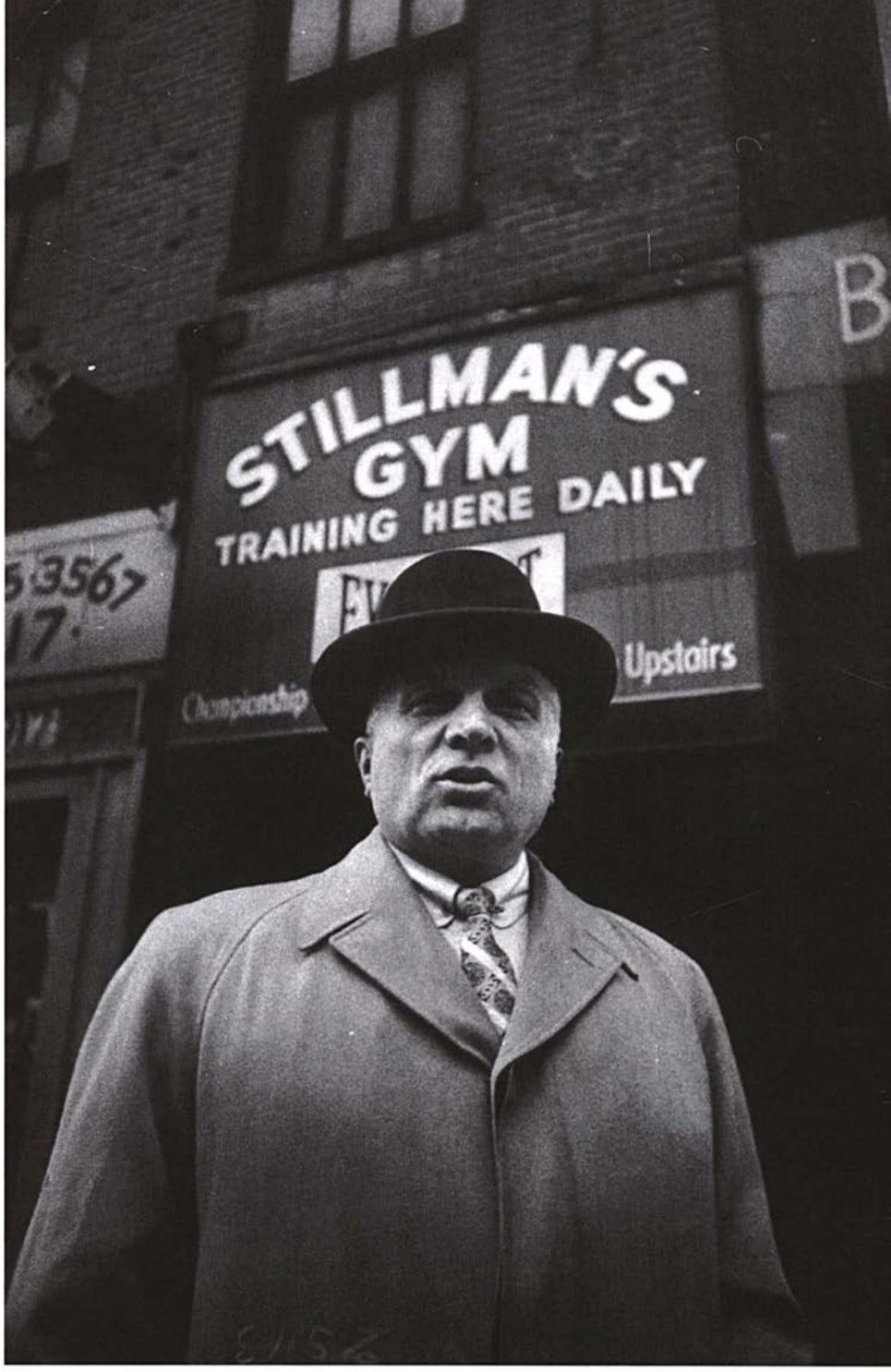
"As a person, I'm just not happy. I'm not in a state where I hate the world and want to commit suicide. Far from it. It's just that although I'm somewhat successful, the people I enjoy the most, like Cus and my mother, aren't here. I know life goes on, but it's tough when you lose two important people."

The heavyweight dreadnought seemed paradoxically vulnerable in his grief, but Tyson didn't always have such faith in D'Amato. It took time. When the State of New York first released Mike into Cus' custody, he couldn't quite figure out where the old man was coming from.

"I didn't know what was going on. I didn't trust him," recalled Tyson when asked about his early days in D'Amato's Catskill Mountains retreat. "The real objective for me was to get out of that place I was in (Tryon School in Johnstown, New York, a penal institution for incorrigible boys). I wanted to get the hell out of there."

Tyson downplays his wild years on the streets, saying: "I wasn't really a bad kid. I used to rob and steal. Other people may consider that bad, but in my atmosphere and neighborhood, it wasn't shit. Other guys did worse things. They murdered people."

At first, D'Amato's home was just another prison to Tyson, but slowly the child of the ghetto was won over by Cus' kindness and understanding.



D'Amato trained New York City boxers at Gramercy Gym and Stillman's for decades before relocating to Catskill.

"CUS WAS MORE THAN A FATHER TO ME... CUS WAS MY BACK-BONE." - MIKE TYSON

According to Mike, it took the better part of two years, but eventually he grew to trust and love the man who had, in a different era, taken both Floyd Patterson and Jose Torres to world championships.

"He did everything for my best interest," said Tyson. "It sounds funny, but when I was late for dinner, he'd always make sure nobody touched my food. And he wouldn't let anybody go into my room. We used to talk all the time. I was young, 14 or 15 years old. The things he was saying didn't always mean that much to me. Then an hour after we would finish talking he would ask me, 'Mike, do you remember anything that I told you?' And I would say 'Yeah, yeah,' and go outside. He told me so many things I would forget them. But then, I'd be walking down the street later and I would remember.

"Cus used to tell me mostly about how to be a successful person. I used to tell him how I would like to meet famous people like actors, and he would tell me to keep doing what I was doing and one day they'd be breaking their necks trying to meet me. And he was right."

One of the things D'Amato strongly believed was that boxing was a form of entertainment, and that in order to be successful, a professional fighter has to also be entertaining. About six months before his death, Cus told The Ring, "From the beginning, Mike has been taught to be exciting." In an effort to show exactly just how well Mike learned this particular lesson, we recently traveled to Albany, New York – the site of his 13th consecutive victory.

It was a cold, rainy night, but almost 3,000 fans braved the elements, filling the Colonie Coliseum to capacity. Many among them proudly wore their Mike Tyson T-shirts. Basketball may have its "Dr. J" and baseball its "Dr. K," but a couple of kids at the Coliseum had a handmade sign proclaiming Tyson "Dr. Knockout." The posters already billed him as the "Future Heavyweight Champion."

The customers tolerated two inept prelims and then it was time for Tyson to do his thing. Whenever possible, Mike's bouts started at 9 p.m., so that the tape of his latest triumph is ready in time for the nightly newscasts across the nation.

The designated victim was Canadian Conroy Nelson, a tall, lanky boxer who entered the ring amidst a scattering of boos. When Mike came down the runway, the arena erupted into a wall of noise that seldom subsided until the hero was on his way to the shower.

It was a typical Tyson fight. Mike exploded from his corner and immediately took the fight to Nelson, who meekly covered up and retreated. Seeing that Nelson was protecting his head at all costs, Tyson wisely concentrated his attack on the body. As wicked hooks from both hands sunk into Nelson's sides, he grimaced and tried his best to survive.

Midway into the round, Tyson paused momentarily, and Nelson landed his only decent punch of the evening – a sharp right uppercut to the chin. The punch brought no adverse effects and Mike quickly resumed his assault. On two occasions, left hooks to Nelson's body almost ended the fight, but Conroy was still on his feet when the bell signaled the end of his three minutes in Tyson's meat grinder.

Tyson is flanked by his erudite (occasionally smug) co-managers Bill Cayton (right) and Jim Jacobs.

Thirty seconds into the second, it was all over. It took just one brutal left hook to the head to take the rest of the fight out of the shell-shocked Canadian. The punch caught Nelson on the side of his nose, sending him tumbling to the floor. He rolled

towards the ropes where he lay, one foot and one arm draped over the bottom rope. When referee Sidney Rubenstein's count reached seven, Nelson made an attempt to struggle to his feet. There was no argument from any quarter.

Shortly after his easy win, Tyson was seated on a couch in the trailer that served as his dressing room, surrounded by the flower of the provincial press. He politely answered the same old questions he's already answered a hundred times before, but it was co-manager Jim Jacobs who really shined during the question-and-answer session. Jacobs parried probing questions into the quality of Mike's opponents with the skill of a career diplomat. When asked about Tyson's next scheduled opponent (the hapless Sammy Scaff), Jacobs made sure to emphasize his size (around 250 pounds) but astutely avoided mentioning just how much of those pounds were pure blubber. It was a virtuoso performance by all concerned – and another step along the trail that Cus D'Amato had so carefully laid out for both manager and fighter.

It is the relationship between D'Amato and Jacobs that ties the Mike Tyson story together in such a neat package. Jacobs, a precise man who chooses his words carefully, is highly respected in boxing circles for both his knowledge of the sport and his association with outstanding fighters. Jacobs and his partner, Bill Cayton, have already handled two world champions in Wilfred Benitez and Edwin Rosario. The film business is another bonus. When it comes to researching opponents or marketing a fighter, they have few peers. But it was Jim's almost lifelong friendship with D'Amato that brought them together with Tyson.

"There is no one in the world whose judgment I trust more than Cus D'Amato's," said Jacobs. "If a thousand people, and I mean this literally, told me a fighter was 'A,' and Cus told me he was 'B,' he was 'B.' And Cus D'Amato told me that in his opinion Mike Tyson was going to be the heavyweight champion of the world. That's all I had to hear."

What has ensued goes far beyond the normal fighter/manager relationship.

"There is an incredible difference between our relationship with Mike and other fighters we've managed," said Jacobs. "When Bill and I got involved with Wilfred Benitez and Edwin Rosario, it was exciting, but it was business. It is completely different with Mike. Our relationship with Mike is, first and foremost, a family relationship. It just so happens that he is a professional boxer. Cus adored Mike, and that love and affection is contagious."

Despite Tyson's remarkable transformation from street punk to a young man on the threshold of possible athletic greatness, he remains partially hidden behind a screen of suspicion.

"I don't trust anyone," claims Mike. "People want to do me favors. They want to take me out to dinner. But they didn't want to buy me dinner five years ago when I didn't have any food.

"Every day of my life I look in the mirror and I know I'm not Mr. Black America. I don't have the most charming personality in the world. But girls continue to call and want to go out with me. And eventually, they're gonna look for something in return."

The bitter residue from the past will probably benefit Tyson as he swims boxing's shark-infested waters. It certainly doesn't sound like any camp followers will be draining Tyson's coffers. And those gnawing memories of his deprived childhood just might provide the catalyst to make D'Amato's formula bear fruit.

As Tyson's knockouts continue to mount, so does the number of people who tend to agree with Jacobs' glowing assessment.

"Right now, I think he's the best young heavyweight I've seen in years," said veteran matchmaker Teddy Brenner. "He's a great offensive fighter, highly competitive. He doesn't know about 'feeling out' an opponent in the first round. He's a good puncher and a good finisher.

"I only have two questions that remain to be answered," continued Brenner. "One, how will he do when someone takes him five or six rounds? Is he too muscle-bound? If you remember, George Foreman was great in the early rounds, but then he used to run out of gas. Two, how well can Tyson take a punch?"

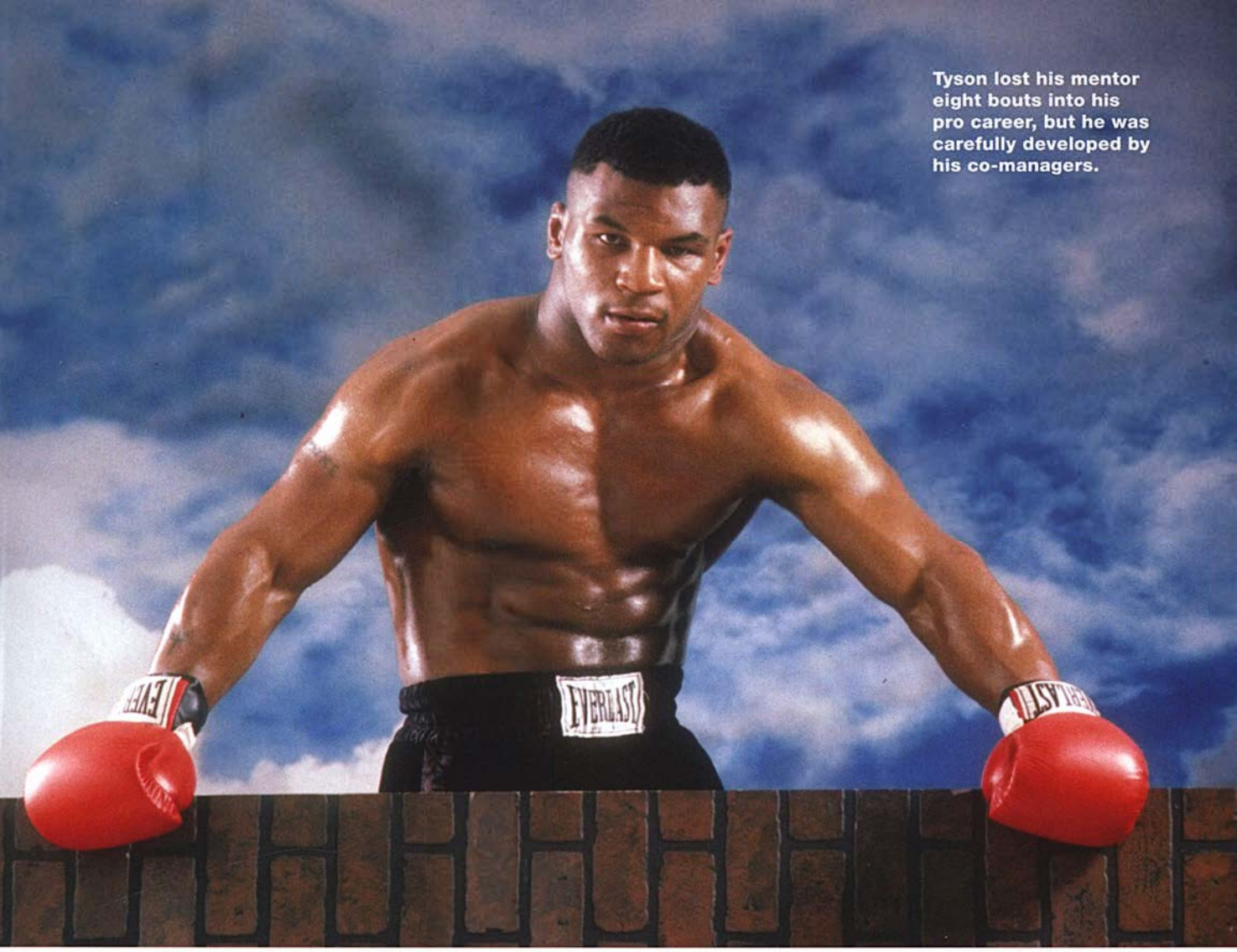
Brenner also helped put into perspective the sometimes questionable quality of Mike's opponents.

"Some of the guys he's beaten have been bums, but guys like Donnie Long and Conroy Nelson usually give you rounds. Tyson took them out early. I have problems getting him opponents for Atlantic City because guys know that if they get knocked out, they'll be suspended and have to take a lot of expensive medical tests before they can fight in New Jersey again."

Others are not so charitable in their evaluation.

"In the way he's been handled, it's almost like he's a 'white hope' in a black man's skin," opined The Ring's own Jack Obermayer, who has had

"OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MIKE IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, A FAMILY RELATIONSHIP." - JIM JACOBS



Tyson lost his mentor eight bouts into his pro career, but he was carefully developed by his co-managers.

several opportunities to observe Tyson in action in Atlantic City. "Tyson has an honorable man behind him in Jim Jacobs, but I think everyone is making far too much of him, far too soon."

Jacobs would be the first to agree that it is premature to start talking about a title fight.

"Take a look at any fighter who comes to your mind – Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, anybody – and look at what they did in the first 10 months of their careers," challenged Jacobs. "They weren't even in the embryo stage of their careers. They weren't even getting started in the first 10 months. That's why Bill and I get hysterical when people ask us when Mike is fighting for the world title."

Jacobs also has an answer for those who criticize the caliber of opposition Tyson sees when he looks across the ring on fight night.

"I take that as a supreme compliment. The more we are criticized, the more I read in the papers that we are moving Mike too slowly, the more I'm pleased. I look on it as a badge of honor. The people who try to suggest the pace of a young, 19-year-old fighter with enormous talent should be moved at are probably brilliant sportswriters, probably excellent television commentators, but whether or not they are qualified to be boxing managers is a different question."

"I find it amusing," adds Cayton, whose production *The Legendary Champions* was nominated for an Academy Award.

Part of D'Amato's method of building a fighter is predicated on never, never allowing one of his fighters to face a man Cus wasn't absolutely sure he could beat. Needless to say, D'Amato was less than enthralled when Patterson finally decided to defend his title against Sonny Liston. And you had better believe that Jacobs and Cayton are following the D'Amato method with Tyson.

"I talked to Cus for thousands of hours about Mike," revealed Jacobs. "Cus would repeat himself. He would tell me, in great detail, over and over, every step to take with Mike. When I think about what I'm doing, I can just press a button in my head and I can hear Cus talking to me. What I am doing is precisely and exactly what Cus told me to do."

But in the final analysis, it doesn't really matter what Jacobs does, or what anybody says or writes about Tyson. We have come full circle in our search for the answer to the riddle the untested Tyson presents – back to the fighter himself. Eventually, Tyson will step into the ring with someone capable of administering the final exam, and then, and only then, will we know whether Cus D'Amato was right.

IRON IN THE FIRE

MIKE TYSON'S EARLY FIGHTS WERE ALL ABOUT A TEENAGED WRECKING BALL BUILDING A MUST-SEE TV REPUTATION, BUT THERE WERE ALSO WARNING SIGNS

By **Wallace Matthews**

I first met Mike Tyson in 1985, when he was just a shy, soft-spoken kid with an incongruously high-pitched voice and a frighteningly vicious punch.

As the boxing writer for Newsday, I documented pretty much his every move from those early days through his march to the heavyweight title, his rape conviction, his imprisonment and his unsuccessful attempt at career resurgence. I interviewed him under pleasant circumstances and under the threat of physical harm (I once had to interview him on live television in the ring right after he had viciously knocked out Lou Savarese in 38 seconds in Scotland and nearly killed the referee with an errant punch as the fight was being stopped). We started out as friends and eventually became bitter enemies.

And while he did not turn out, in my opinion, to be what his team fully expected would be his destiny – to be remembered as the greatest heavyweight champion in boxing history – he certainly waltzed off with the title of the most fascinating and at times confounding athlete I have ever covered, a list that includes the likes of Alex Rodriguez, Lawrence Taylor, Dwight Gooden, Michael Jordan and Derek Jeter.

There may have been less to Tyson the fighter than originally met the eye, but there was no doubt that Tyson the phenomenon was real. The "Cus and the Kid" narrative, which fell apart as soon as Tyson got his first real taste of wealth, fame and freedom, was compelling. And with the exception of the pitiful post-Holyfield end of his career, on the nights that Mike Tyson fought, the world stopped to watch.

I was among the group of national boxing writers who received in the mail a VHS tape upon which was written, in black Sharpie, "Mike Tyson's First 11 KOs." It was roughly a half-hour of some of the most cartoonish mayhem ever committed in a boxing ring, a succession of clips of a short, muscular guy pulverizing hopelessly outclassed opponents. Guys flew across the ring, slid across the canvas, dropped like bricks in a bathtub and collapsed limply down ringposts resembling, in the immortal prose of A.J. Liebling, "flour flowing through a chute."

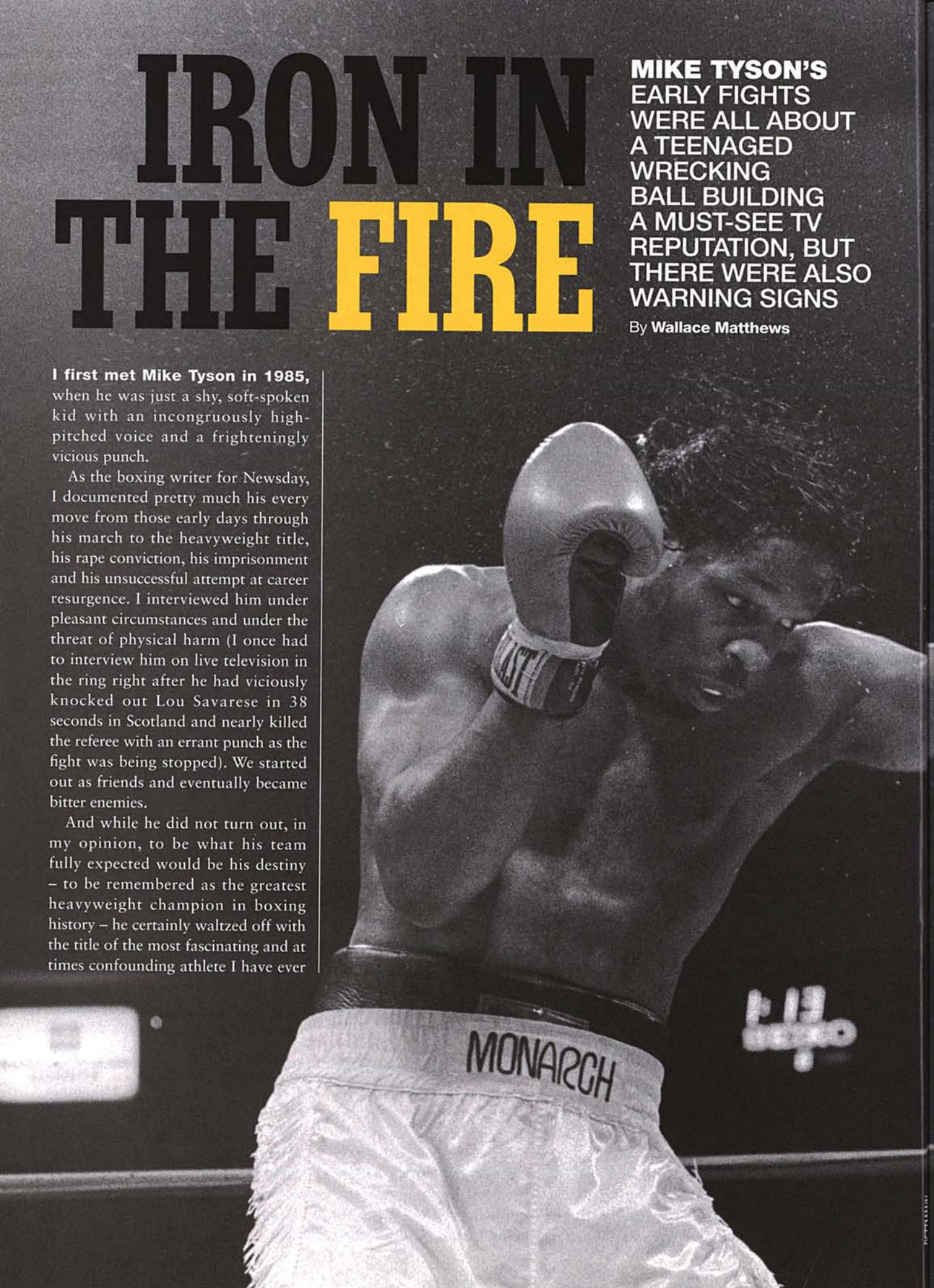
And although the opponents were pure dreck, the kid was dispatching them with unusual panache and, frankly, unsettling ferocity. Fighting behind his curious peek-a-boo stance, Tyson would weave, quickly and somewhat robotically, from side-to-side before explosively unleashing short, quick lefts and rights that seemed hard enough to cave in the walls of a building or fell an oak tree.

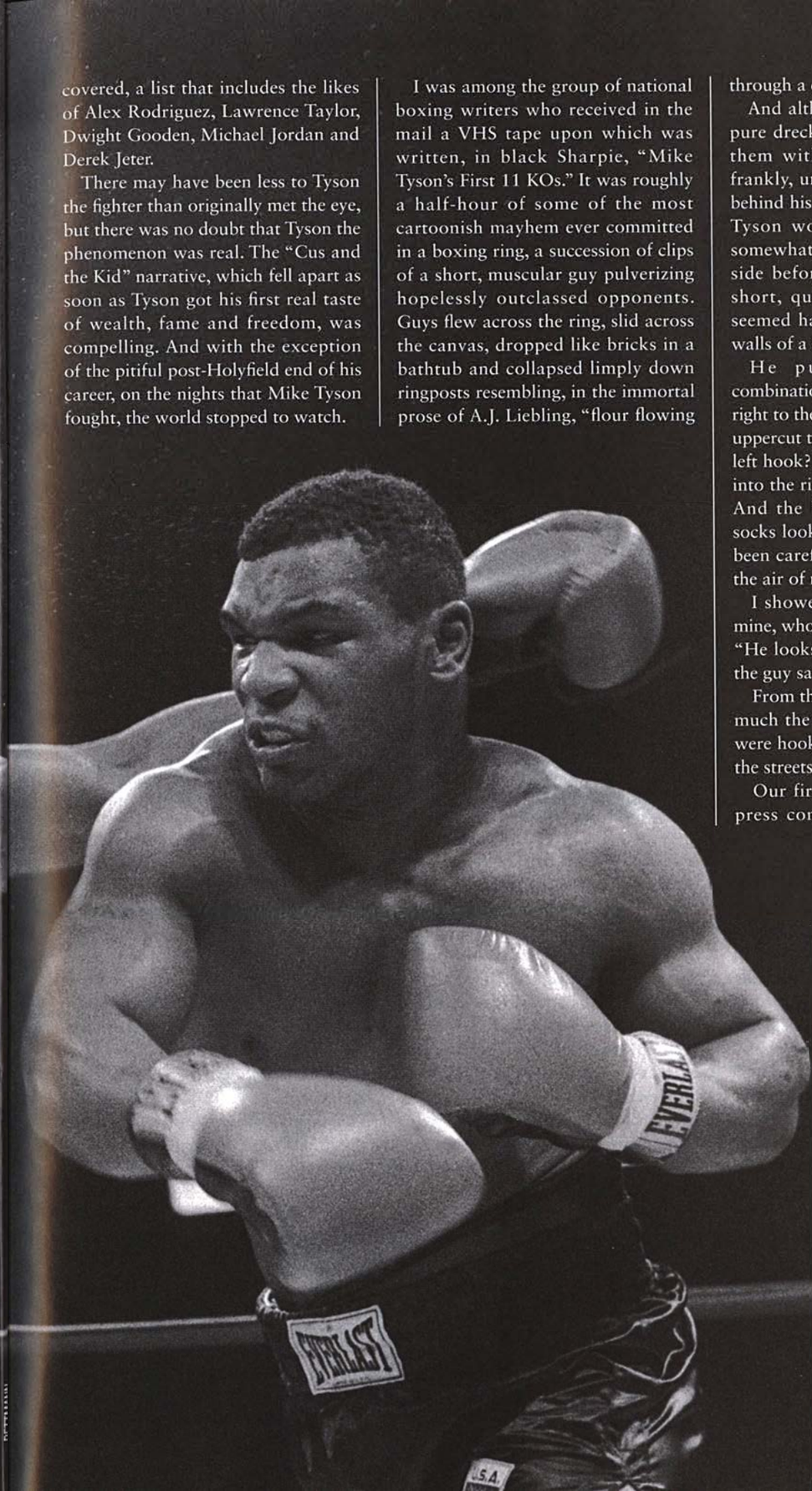
He put together strange combinations – who the hell led with a right to the body, followed with a right uppercut to the chin and ended with a left hook? He always seemed to come into the ring looking to kill someone. And the black-trunks-no-robe-no-socks look, which I later learned had been carefully crafted, only added to the air of menace.

I showed the tape to an editor of mine, who was aghast at what he saw. "He looks like a boxing linebacker," the guy said.

From that moment, we – and pretty much the rest of the boxing world – were hooked on this strange kid from the streets of Brooklyn.

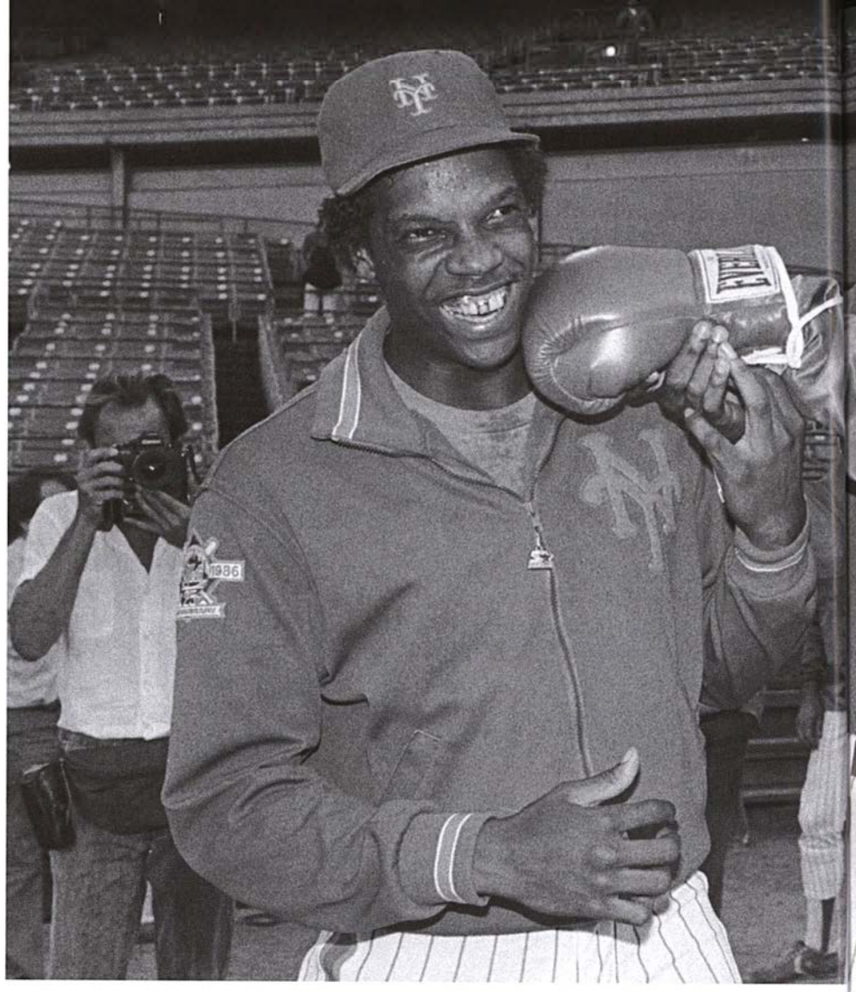
Our first meeting occurred at the press conference for Tyson's New

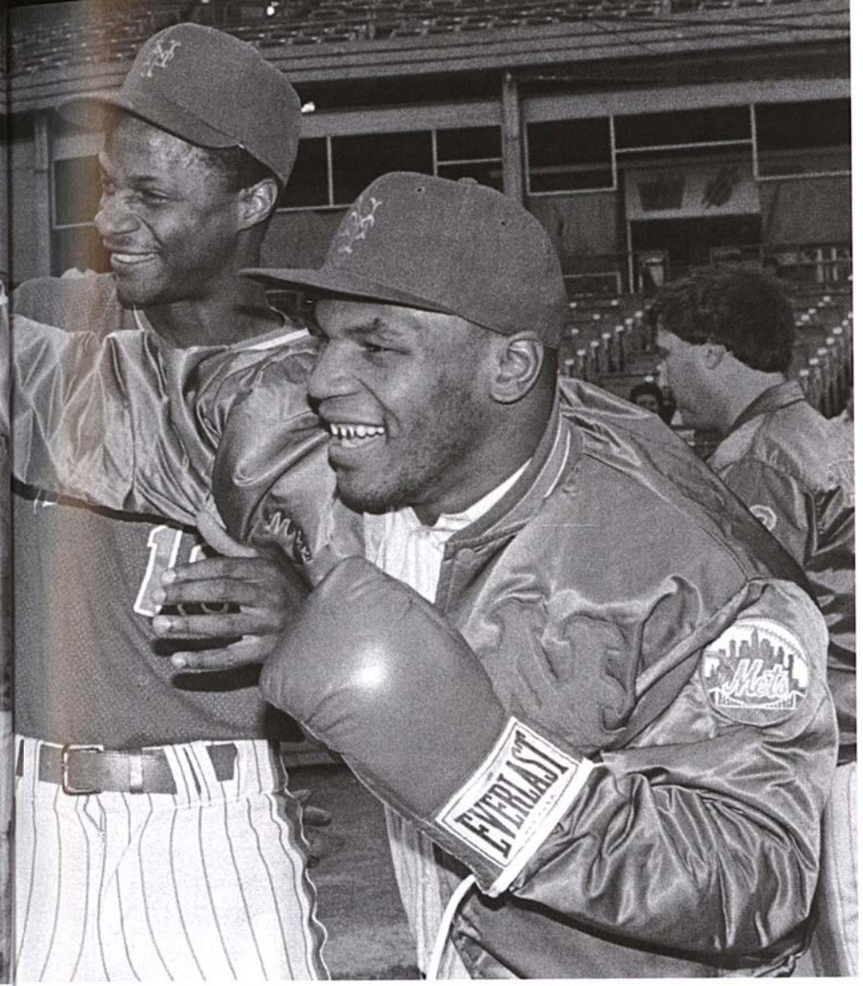




Tyson takes it to fringe contender Mitch "Blood" Green, who lasted the 10-round distance on May 20, 1986.

IRON IN THE FIRE





Tyson pals around with Dwight Gooden and Darryl Strawberry (center) at a Mets game two months prior to winning the WBC heavyweight title.

York City debut, a match against a sacrificial lamb named Sammy Scaff on the undercard of a middleweight bout between Iran Barkley and Mike Tinley in the Felt Forum, Madison Square Garden's 5,000-seat baby arena. The bout was scheduled for 10 rounds, but everyone knew that was a joke; Scaff was 31 years old and going nowhere with a 13-6 record that included five KO losses. This was not going to be a fight, but a legalized public assault designed to show off boxing's latest destruction machine. It would be like watching Mickey Mantle take batting practice.

Tyson, mere months past his 19th birthday, showed up shirtless in a brown leather jacket and matching leather pants so tight they could barely contain his 215 pounds. Despite his fearsome appearance, however, there was something likable about the kid, who was soft-spoken and humble. That could not be said about his management team, the imperious Bill Cayton and Jim Jacobs, who could manage to sound condescending while asking you to pass the salt.

Jacobs and Jose Torres, who was the chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission but on this day sounded more like a member of Tyson's PR team, did most of the talking. The news conference lasted 75 minutes, which, as I noted in the lede to my Newsday piece, was precisely twice as long as the aggregate time of Tyson's previous 13 pro fights, against opponents with a combined record of 84-70-6. One of them, Larry Sims, was 3-16-2 when he fought Tyson and had already been KO'd 10 times. Clearly, they were fattening Tyson up on stiffs. But it sure was fun watching him eat.

As expected, Tyson needed just 79 seconds to feast on Scaff. I wasn't there to see it, having left for Las Vegas the previous day to cover a much bigger fight, the welterweight unification title fight between Donald Curry and Milton McCrory. That turned out to be only slightly less of a mismatch than Tyson-Scaff.

About a month later, I made the four-hour drive up to Catskill for my first sitdown with Tyson. On the way to the mansion overlooking the Hudson where Tyson had lived with the recently deceased Cus D'Amato for the previous seven years and where he had learned to box, I passed a hand-lettered sign made out of a cardboard box that had been broken open, folded flat and affixed to a wooden pole at the foot of the house's long gravel driveway.

On it, someone had written in black felt-tipped pen, "Mike Tyson, next heavyweight champion of the world. Way to go, Mike!!!" On each of the four side flaps was "16 knockouts." In the month since knocking out Scaff, Tyson had blasted out two more hapless victims, Mark Young and David Jaco, both in the first round.

That hand-lettered sign embarrassed Tyson to no end – "Isn't that crazy?" he had said. "Your own neighbors aren't supposed to make a big deal out of you" – and the conversation quickly turned deadly serious.

"I wish I had some friends who didn't know anything about me being a boxer," he said. "People love you when you're successful, but if you're not, who really cares about you?"

Already, Tyson seemed aware that people were latching onto him not because of who he was, but what he was likely to become. It was a theme I would hear from him repeatedly over the next five years. And one that would be proven correct in Tyson's case, time and again.

I left the house that night actually feeling kind of sorry for him. A few days later, we crossed paths again when he clobbered another tomato can, Mike Jameson, at an Atlantic City casino owned by a loudmouthed Queens real estate developer named Donald Trump.

Those two lives would intersect in a way that was unimaginable in January 1986, but then at the time, a lot of what lay ahead for Mike Tyson was neither imaginable nor probable.

Starting with the Jaco fight on January 11, 1986, I covered 19 of the next 21 Tyson fights, missing only his KO of Steve Zouski in March 1986 because I was in Vegas covering the Hagler-Mugabi/Hearns-Shuler doubleheader, and the Jose Ribalta fight in August 1986 because I was in Paris on my honeymoon. Otherwise, I had a first-class ticket on the Mike Tyson Knock Your Ass Out Express with no intention of getting off.

Predictably, as the quality of Tyson's opposition improved, the efficiency of his work declined, and the honeymoon period he and his camp were enjoying with the boxing media began to sour.

The first cracks in our relationship started to appear after my coverage of his sloppy fifth-round TKO of Jesse Ferguson, a career sparring partner and mediocre heavyweight. The bout was originally ruled a DQ due to Ferguson's excessive holding, but the New York State Athletic Commission – Jose Torres, remember? – changed the result to a sixth-round TKO, no doubt to keep Tyson's record – 18 fights, 18 wins, 18 KOs – intact.

I wrote that in Newsday, which did not sit well with Jacobs. But what Jacobs really hated was that in my fight story, I included the following

TALE OF THE TAPE:

« DEC. 6,1985:
Beat Sammy Scaff by TKO at 1:19 in Round 1.

JAN. 11,1986: »
Beat David Jaco by TKO at 2:16 in Round 1.

« JAN. 24, 1986:
Beat Mike Jameson by TKO at 0:46 in Round 5.

MAR. 10,1986: »
Beat Steve Zouski by KO at 2:39 in Round 3.

verbatim quote from Tyson:

"I was trying to drive that bone in his nose up into his brain."

That didn't square with the carefully crafted "Cus and the Kid" narrative. So when that wonderfully sadistic quote popped out of Tyson's mouth, Jacobs blanched. He tried to spin it as a joke, something that Mike didn't really mean. Then he fired the publicist who included it on the post-fight quote sheet. But Tyson had said it, we all heard it, and everybody used it. It was too good not to.

Things only got worse two months later when Tyson barely escaped a draw against James "Quick" Tillis by virtue of a slightly fluky fourth-round knockdown that provided his narrow margin of victory on two official scorecards. Plus, once it became obvious that he could not blow Tillis out, Tyson became frustrated and confused. He began following Tillis around the ring like a puppy on a leash. The second half of that fight was a precursor to what we would see years later against Buster Douglas and Evander Holyfield.

My lede in Newsday after the fight won me no friends in Tysonville:

"For Mike Tyson, yesterday was a day of firsts. It was the first time his best punches failed to knock out an opponent. It was the first time he heard the boos of a crowd directed at him. It was the first time he was forced to go the distance. After 19 walkovers, it was the first time Mike Tyson was really in a fight."

But that was nothing compared to my kicker:

"In the best tradition of selfless sacrifice, Tillis may have demonstrated to the rest of the world's heavyweights how Mike Tyson could be beaten, even if he couldn't quite do it himself."

This did not sit well with the increasingly thin-skinned Tyson camp, which wanted it both ways: When he looked good, they wanted Tyson to be considered among the greatest heavyweights of all time. When he looked human, they wanted him to be judged in the context of what he was: a 19-year-old boy fighting grown men. They never seemed to understand that it didn't work that way. He was either one or the other.

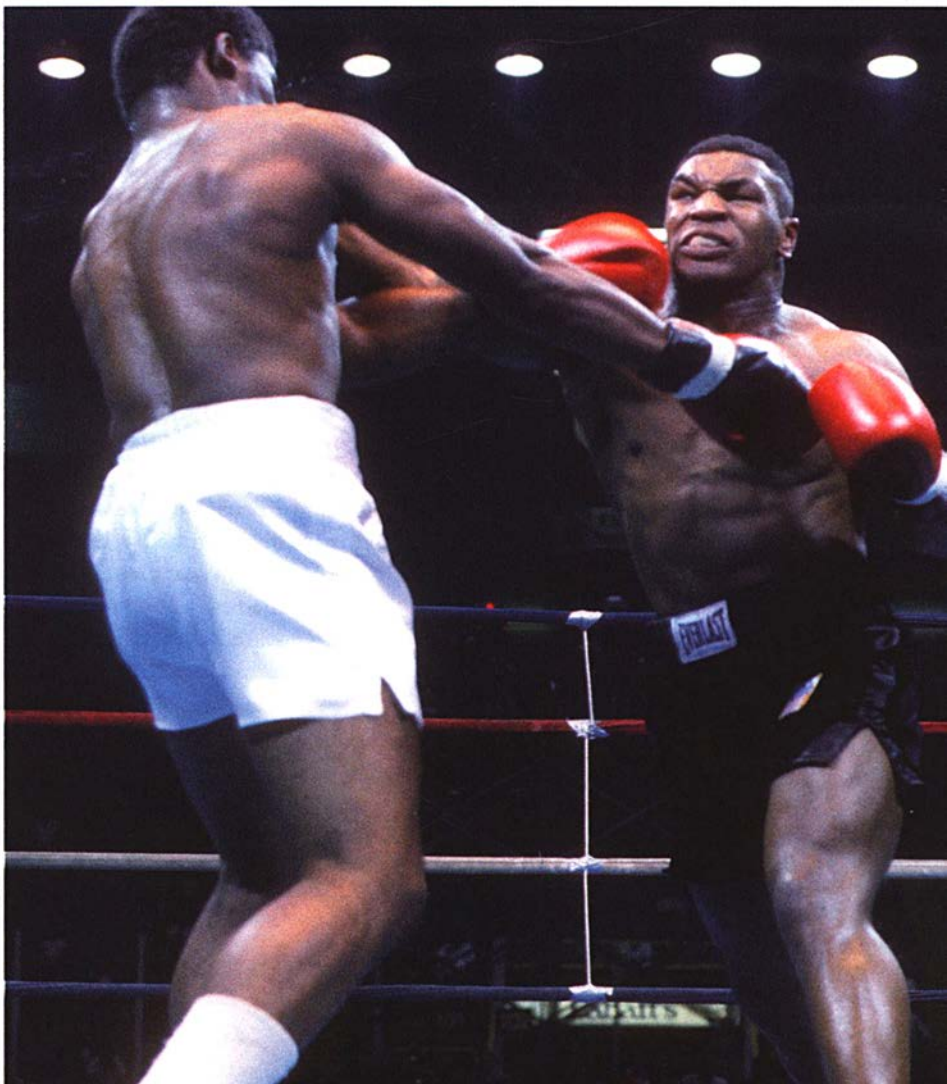
Tyson's fight schedule also revealed the doubt his camp was feeling about him. For the first two years of his career, he basically fought twice a month. It was as if there was a strong desire in the camp to keep their 20-year-old tiger either in the gym or in the ring. And off the streets.

Which is no doubt why, 17 days later, Tyson was back in the ring against Mitch Green, a loudmouth, a blowhard and a braggart whose ring performances never lived up to his words, which was unfortunate because he was funny as hell. And likable.

Green was more argumentative outside the ring than inside it. He had gone through six managers in 18 pro fights by the time he signed to meet Tyson in May 1986. He had a draping Jheri curl and an ever-present toothpick in his mouth, which observers to his training sessions at Gleason's Gym swore was even there when he sparred.

Despite his fearsome appearance, Green wasn't much of a puncher and threw his right hand like more of a slap. The fight with Tyson was expected to be busy work designed to keep the erratic Tyson occupied.

A couple years later, Tyson would score a one-punch KO over Green in an early a.m. street fight outside a Harlem boutique called Dapper Dan's. But in the Garden ring on fight night, Tyson couldn't do much damage against the 6-foot-5 Green, who was adept at holding, smothering



Tyson struggled with former title challenger James Tillis, the first pro to take him the distance.

Tyson blitzed Reggie Gross, who was more dangerous out of the ring.

and riding with Tyson's punches. The crowd booed Tyson's inability to knock out Green, but then no one else ever had, either.

The next morning in Newsday I also characterized Tyson's failure to knock Green out as "disappointing in the way Dwight Gooden is disappointing when he wins but scatters nine hits and strikes out only three."

By Tyson's standards, it was his second consecutive pedestrian performance.

The Green disappointment was followed by a return to the tried-and-true Tyson formula, a series of quick KOs of carefully chosen victims rarely separated by more than two weeks.

On June 13, Reggie Gross was KO'd in the first round at the Garden on the undercard of the Hector Camacho-Edwin Rosario lightweight title main event.

One thing I didn't know at the time was that boxing was just a side job for Gross, who in real life was an enforcer for a Baltimore drug mob. Three months after the Tyson fight, he was arrested for shooting three rival drug dealers to death and is currently serving a life sentence in a maximum-security prison. In his 22nd pro fight, Mike Tyson had steamrolled an actual killer.

Fifteen days after Gross, William Hosea got the treatment up in Troy, New York. Two weeks after that, it was Lorenzo Boyd's turn in the barrel. Unlike the previous two victims, Boyd lasted into the second round.

Fifteen days after the Boyd fight, Tyson delivered probably the most destructive performance of his career against Marvis Frazier, the son of the legendary Smokin' Joe Frazier. Marvis was taller and more athletic-looking than his human wrecking ball of a dad but possessed none of Joe's ferocity. But Joe, who was his son's trainer, was trying to re-cast Marvis in his own image as a fighter. The old man had him bobbing and weaving and constantly moving inside, which worked well for the 5-foot-11 perpetual motion machine that was Joe Frazier but was disastrous for Marvis. He had already been bombed out in the first round by Larry Holmes and it was hard to imagine how he could escape a similar fate with Tyson.

It turned out there wasn't much time to ruminate over Marvis Frazier's prospects once the two fighters were in the ring. Just before the bell, my eyes were fixed on Tyson in his corner. All his weight was forward, like a sprinter in the blocks waiting for the gun to sound, and I could swear he was foaming at the mouth. He was so geeked up for destruction that when the bell rang, he was across the ring before Frazier even had a chance to set his feet. A series of the most vicious uppercuts I have ever seen deposited Frazier's limp body in a neutral corner. The entire affair lasted all of 30 seconds. That ritual slaughter, presented live on ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, cemented the image of Tyson as a force of nature in the psyche of millions of sports fans around the world.

From there, it was a straight line to the destiny laid out for Tyson by D'Amato and carried out by Jacobs, Cayton and trainer Kevin Rooney. Tyson needed 10 rounds to stop a tough Ribalta, who rose from three knockdowns over the course of the bout, and then less than two to starch Alfonzo Ratliff, a 6-foot-4, beefed-up cruiserweight who had vowed to "beat Tyson like a government mule." Instead, he ran around the ring for one round and found a soft spot to land in the second.

There was only one place left to go – a title shot against Trevor Berbick, the conqueror of a washed-up Muhammad Ali in 1981 and the current placeholder for the WBC belt.

Mike Tyson, five months out of his teen years and seven months from being able to legally buy a drink, was about to meet his destiny.

MIKE TYSON'S ANNIHILATION OF TREVOR BERBICK MADE HIM HISTORY'S YOUNGEST HEAVYWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER AND AN INSTANT WORLD-BEATER

By **Nigel Collins**

WELCOME TO THE TYSON ERA »

Berbick was tough enough to go 15 rounds with Larry Holmes but couldn't last six minutes with Tyson.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This feature was originally published in the March 1987 issue of The Ring Magazine.

One came away from Mike Tyson's second-round annihilation of Trevor Berbick feeling he'd seen a pivotal episode in boxing history, a match to be remembered, not for the fight itself, for there was none, but for the historic significance of the moment. Like Dempsey's cruel demolition of Willard, Louis' battering of Braddock and Marciano's come-from-behind kayo over Walcott, Tyson's second-round knockout of Berbick ushered in a new boxing era – the Tyson Era.

One also came away from the Las Vegas Hilton Center feeling he'd witnessed an execution. Tyson disposed of Berbick with all the subtlety of a slaughterhouse worker wielding a maul. So precise was his violent dismissal of the WBC champion, the question on everyone's lips was, "Can anybody beat him?"

It is a question that could keep arenas full and television ratings soaring for a long time to come. For Tyson not only wins, he does so in a manner that stirs instincts long dormant in man's soul. Call it blood lust if you will, but anyway you say it, it spells box office bonanza.

Though few were foolhardy enough to pick Berbick to win, most learned observers agreed Trevor would give the 20-year-old dreadnought a decent workout, administering a bruising welcome to the championship ranks before succumbing to the drive and enthusiasm of youth. But the "Fighting Preacher" never had a prayer. Tyson reduced his participation to a cameo role, a mere prop in the drama that saw Mike become the youngest fighter in boxing history to win even partial recognition as the world heavyweight champion.

If there are still some who doubt Tyson's authenticity, they belong among those who believe the world is flat and the moon is made of green cheese. The vast majority are either long faithful or newly converted to Tyson's camp.

With the first step easily accomplished, Tyson is well on his way to the undisputed heavyweight title. By the time you read this, Tyson will be back in Las Vegas prepping for the next step in his quest – against the WBA champion in early March. The fight will once again be hosted by the Las Vegas Hilton, but in a specially constructed outdoor stadium large enough (15,000 seats) to accommodate Tyson's growing legion of fans.

Who will be looking at him from the opposite corner is still undecided as we go to press. Tim Witherspoon and Tony Tubbs are scheduled to meet again in Madison Square Garden on December 12 in a rematch that became a necessity when Witherspoon's urine came up dirty following his 15-round decision over Tubbs last January in Atlanta [Editor's note: Witherspoon ended up facing Bonecrusher Smith instead of Tubbs]. Since then, Witherspoon has boosted his stock by stopping Frank Bruno in London, while Tubbs padded his bank account, if not his record, by accepting step-aside money.

Witherspoon just might have the best chance of stalling Tyson's march to the Hall of Fame. Owner of probably the best chin in the division, "Terrible Tim" has mixed with the best of company. His 1983 loss to Larry Holmes was razor-close, and his wins over Greg Page (W 12), Bonecrusher Smith (W 12), Quick Tillis (KO 1), Renaldo Snipes (W 10), James Broad (KO 2), and Bruno (KO 11) give him the best resume among the current crop of big boys.

Whether it's smoking pot or gorging himself at the dinner table, the Philadelphian's biggest problem has always been a lack of discipline outside the ring. If he beats Tubbs impressively in their rematch and whips himself into top shape for Tyson, "Iron Mike" just might have a fight on his hands. Otherwise, Witherspoon will seem little more than a Berbick clone.

Tubbs, should he prevail the second time around against Witherspoon, is another fighter who constantly threatens to eat himself out of a career. A gifted boxer with surprising speed for a large man, a finely conditioned Tubbs should provide Tyson with a much more evasive target than any of his previous opponents. But Tubbs is a pitty-pat puncher without the power to hold Mike at bay. If Tony is the WBA champion come March, another Tyson victory is practically assured.

Assuming Tyson is victorious against the WBA champ, only Michael Spinks, the undefeated IBF titleholder, stands in his way of becoming the youngest undisputed heavyweight champion of all time. Of course, Spinks may decide to duck the issue by ducking Tyson. In that event, who's left, besides Spinks, that is capable of giving Tyson a tussle?

The most obvious choice is 1984 Olympic super heavyweight champion Tyrell Biggs. But even Biggs' co-manager, Shelly Finkel, has his doubts.

"Maybe in a year or so," said Finkel only minutes after Tyson sent Berbick reeling into obscurity. "Even then he would have to stick and move, try to outbox him. Nobody is going to be able to punch with Tyson."

The jury is still out on the undefeated Biggs. He was progressing well after kicking his cocaine habit until he suffered a broken collarbone during his winning effort against Jeff Sims. Although Tyrell has recovered from the injury and scored several more wins, he has yet to regain the form he showed prior to the accident. He could still develop into the challenger of the future, but at this time there are too many unanswered questions to consider him a serious threat to Tyson's dominance.

So, who's left?

Well, there's former WBC boss Pinklon Thomas, currently on the comeback trail. But nobody who saw his listless win over William Hosea (a one-round Tyson victim) on the Tyson-Berbick undercard would pay to see the match. Pinklon has a pretty left jab, but it is highly unlikely it would be enough to bother the rampaging Tyson.

Of course, any of the above would have been regarded as a serious test for Tyson before the Berbick fight. Surprisingly enough – in light of the eventual outcome – as the countdown to fight time approached, the odds in Tyson's favor narrowed from 5-1 to 3-1. As is often the case, when so-called experts waver (the sportscaster on one local Vegas TV station picked

Tyson didn't just knock out Berbick, he bewildered and overwhelmed the veteran with his power, speed, footwork and technique.

Berbick), "wise guys" hedge their bets. The one person who never had the slightest doubt of the outcome was Tyson. In fact, his "incredible calm" was a "little disquieting" to co-manager Jim Jacobs.

"Mike asked me if I was nervous before the fight," reported Jacobs. "He said not to worry, it's not unusual to be nervous before a world title fight."

The near-capacity crowd of 8,743 at the posh Hilton Center was star-studded with celebrities from all walks of public life. High priced ticket-holders rubbed elbows with the likes of Kirk Douglas and Mr. T, while those in the bleachers craned their necks to catch a glimpse of fistic nobility ranging from Muhammad Ali to Hector Camacho (the only fighter who drew boos when introduced). Such distractions were essential during the quintessential Don King undercard – a travesty that threatened to set a new standard for diabolical matchmaking.

The challenger made his entrance first, ducking between the ropes as the crowd roared its approval. For the first time in his career, Tyson was not completely bare-chested. He wore a towel over the upper portion of his torso but remained faithful to his trademark no-socks look. Mike wore black trunks in defiance of the Nevada commission, which upheld the champion's prerogative to pick the color of his trunks. Berbick chose black in an attempt at one-upmanship, but Tyson accepted a $5,000 fine and wore black anyway.

Though Tyson was obviously the fans' favorite, Berbick also had support, and a smattering of yellow and green Jamaican flags could be seen waving bravely throughout the arena as Trevor made his way to the ring. His incongruous, calf-high black socks prompted one wag to note that "between them, there was not a decent pair of hose."

Ring announcer Chuck Hull introduced the combatants, referee Mills Lane gave them their last minute instructions, and at the sound of the first bell, the fight was on.

As expected, Tyson attacked immediately, throwing himself into the fray with vehemence. It was, however, a more controlled fury than Mike had displayed in the past. He seemed to have achieved a new level of discipline at exactly the moment he needed it most. Gone were the wild swings of earlier bouts, replaced instead by unerringly accurate combinations.

The scheduled 12-rounder was only seconds old when Tyson, 221¼ pounds, connected with his first punch. His hand speed was astonishing for a man his size, and he had little trouble beating the taller Berbick to the punch.

"People talk about Mike's punching power," observed Jacobs. "But it's his speed. Nobody ever sees the punch (coming)."

Don King knew Tyson would soon be the undisputed champ.

At first Berbick, a well-conditioned 218½, seemed to absorb Tyson's bombs well. There was even brief cause for hope among his followers when he caught Tyson with a clubbing right to the head. But the rally was short-lived. After a quick clinch, Tyson resumed control, scourging Trevor with a vicious assortment of jabs, rights and left hooks to the head.

As the first round drew to a close, Tyson connected with a short left to the head that sent Berbick stumbling backward across the ring in obvious

"I REFUSE TO GET HURT. I REFUSE TO GET KNOCKED DOWN. I REFUSE TO LOSE." - MIKE TYSON

distress. The challenger was still dishing out punishment when the round-ending bell interrupted his assault.

Berbick wobbled back to his corner with a quizzical look on his face. Never the most mobile of heavyweights, he had opted to slug it out with Tyson, a decision he would later regret.

"I made a silly mistake," confessed Berbick. "I tried to prove my manhood with him in the early rounds."

Unfortunately for Berbick, there were to be no later rounds in which to make amends for his rocky start. Tyson had been training for this fight for most of his life and had vowed to leave the ring either champion or dead.

"I refuse to get hurt. I refuse to get knocked down. I refuse to lose," he declared. "I refuse to leave the ring alive without that belt."

Against such fanatical determination, Berbick was practically helpless. In the second, Tyson immediately picked up where he had left off the previous round, hammering the rapidly fading champion with a series of searing rights to the head. As Berbick frantically sought shelter along the ropes, a particularly savage right sent him crashing to the canvas like a man whose legs had been jerked from under him by an invisible rope attached to his ankles.

Showing more valor than common sense, Trevor quickly scrambled to his feet by the count of three. As Lane administered the mandatory eight-count, Berbick stared blankly at the referee's face, the picture of a wounded animal waiting for the hunter's final bullet.

Tyson displayed remarkable control going into the finisher. Instead of struggling for punching room when Berbick wrapped him in a series of bearhugs, Mike patiently waited for the referee to do his job. Then, with his hands free again, he lashed out with deadly concentration, nailing his adversary with the kind of combinations unseen since Joe Louis ruled the heavyweight domain.

"I was throwing, what can you say, hydrogen bombs," said Tyson. "Every punch with murderous intentions."

Then it happened!

Tyson sank a right into Berbick's kidney and followed with an economical left hook that caught Berbick high on the temple, just in back of his ear. There was a split-second pause while the shock traveled from Trevor's cerebrum to his legs, then, the circuit complete, he toppled over onto his back.

There followed a tragic/comic tableau that bore testimony not only to Tyson's punching power, but to Berbick's courage. The stricken champion knew he had to try to regain his feet, but his legs simply wouldn't obey the message his brain was sending them. On his first attempt to rise, he flopped over sideways and fell partially through the ropes. He tried again and floundered grotesquely in the opposite direction, finally coming to rest in the arms of Mills Lane, who stopped the fight 2:35 into the second round.

Flush with victory, Tyson was quick to pay tribute to the late Cus D'Amato, who rescued him from reform school and molded him into the kind of fighter capable of winning the heavyweight championship after only a 20-month pro apprenticeship.

"Without Cus, this never could have happened," said Tyson.

When someone wanted to know what D'Amato, who maintained Mike was a future champion from the beginning of their relationship, might have said had he lived to see his prophecy fulfilled, Mike replied: "He'd be downstairs making my breakfast as always and I'd be afraid to go down, for all the criticism."

We will never know what faults D'Amato might have found with Tyson's title-winning performance, but Berbick surely wasn't in the mood to find any.

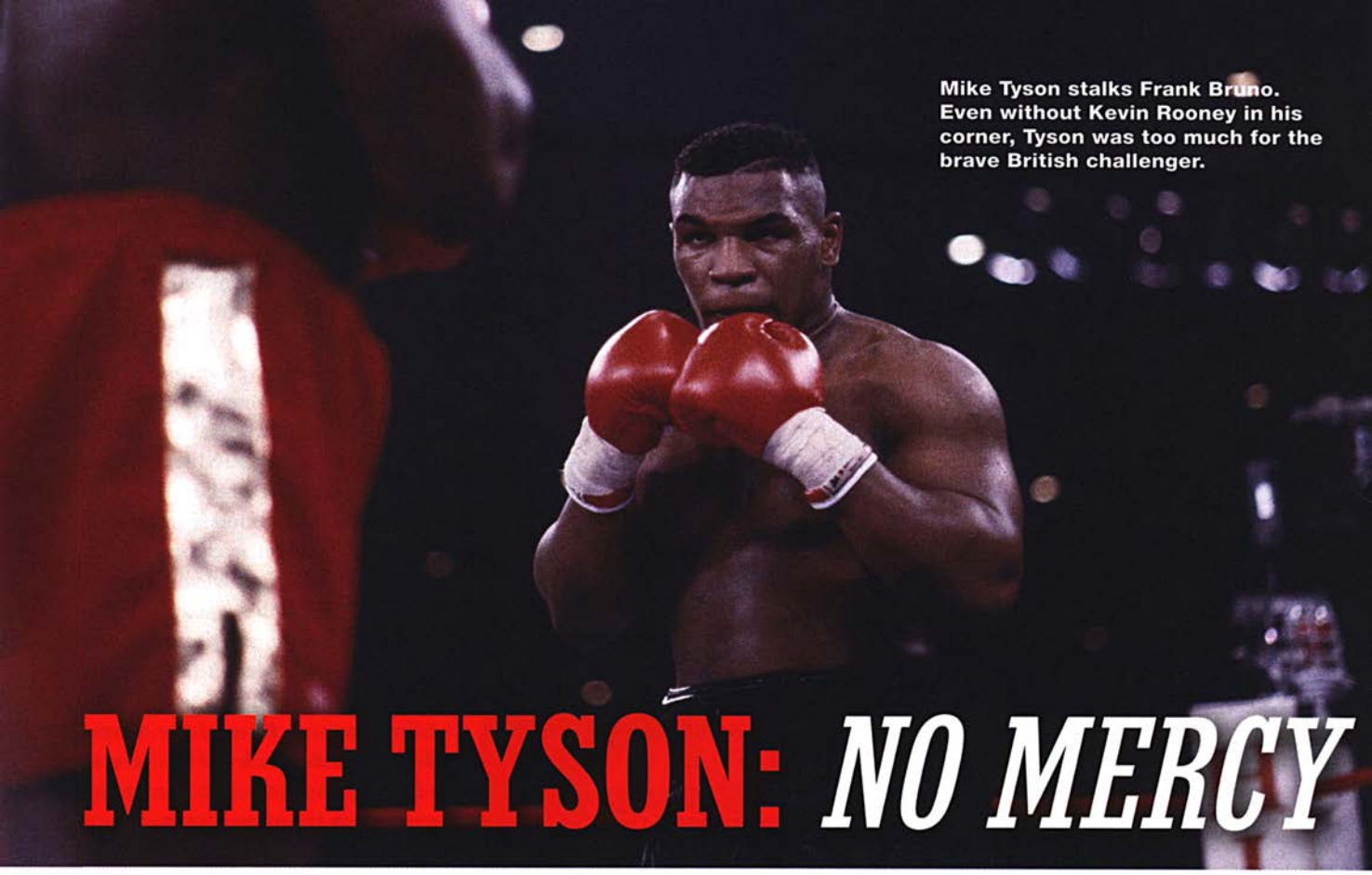
"You saw it. I fought a stupid fight," said Berbick. "He's a very hard, very sharp puncher. I never saw the punch that put me down. I think he has a very good chance to be the undisputed champion."

Less than three hours after his triumph over Berbick, fans were lined up 20 deep at the door of Mike's invitation-only victory party. Security was already having great difficulty controlling the mini-mob when a cry went up: "He's coming out!"

As the new WBC champion emerged from the celebration, he was immediately surrounded by well-wishers and media types. Mike squinted in the blinding glare of the television lights as a reporter shoved a microphone in his face. Two burly companions did their best to protect him from the crush of humanity, but it took a flying wedge of hotel security guards to guide him to safety.

At this juncture, there doesn't seem to be a heavyweight around capable of defeating Tyson in the ring. But from now on, fighting will probably be the easiest part of Mike's life. Fame has ruined more than one fighter. Some cynics, desperate for a pessimistic angle, hint it might be Tyson's downfall. But Mike certainly doesn't think so.

"I'm the youngest heavyweight champion and I'm going to be the oldest," said Tyson.



Mike Tyson stalks Frank Bruno. Even without Kevin Rooney in his corner, Tyson was too much for the brave British challenger.

MIKE TYSON: *NO MERCY*

IN HIS FIRST REIGN OF TERROR, MIKE TYSON PRODUCED THE BEST FORM OF HIS CAREER AND SOME UNFORGETTABLE KNOCKOUTS

By **Tom Gray**

It was Sunday, November 23, 1986, and the location was the United Services Club in Motherwell, Scotland. I was 11 years old and I'd just been given a painful snooker lesson by my father. My old man didn't believe in letting me win at anything – not chess, not Monopoly, not snooker. On the contrary, I was always taught that it was better to win than to lose. No mercy.

The snooker over, we were quickly joined by an excited regular who was carrying a videotape. "You have to see this," yelled the middle-aged man with urgency. He handed the VHS cassette to the manager, who disappeared into another room behind the bar. Suddenly a boxing match appeared on an old television set located high up in the corner of the snooker room. It was Trevor Berbick's first WBC heavyweight title defense against Mike Tyson, which had been fought only hours prior.

In terms of being able to pinpoint the matchup, this is my earliest boxing memory.

About half a dozen men walked toward the screen, each armed with a beer, a whisky or both. It was roughly 11 a.m., but hardcore drinkers are known to start early in the west of Scotland.

Tyson started early too, thumping Berbick with cannonball power-shots that rocked the champion all over the ring. I remember feeling sorry for Berbick and wondering why he got off his stool to try again in Round 2. Within seconds, a cascade of vicious blows almost put him through the canvas. "He's a killer!" said my father, who, like me, was seeing Tyson for the very first time. The other men watching were laughing at Berbick's predicament, and that laughter only grew louder when Berbick was decked again toward the end of the round. Badly hurt, the stricken champ attempted to rise, but like an antelope missing a portion of its leg after being mauled by a lion, he fell again ... and again.

No mercy.

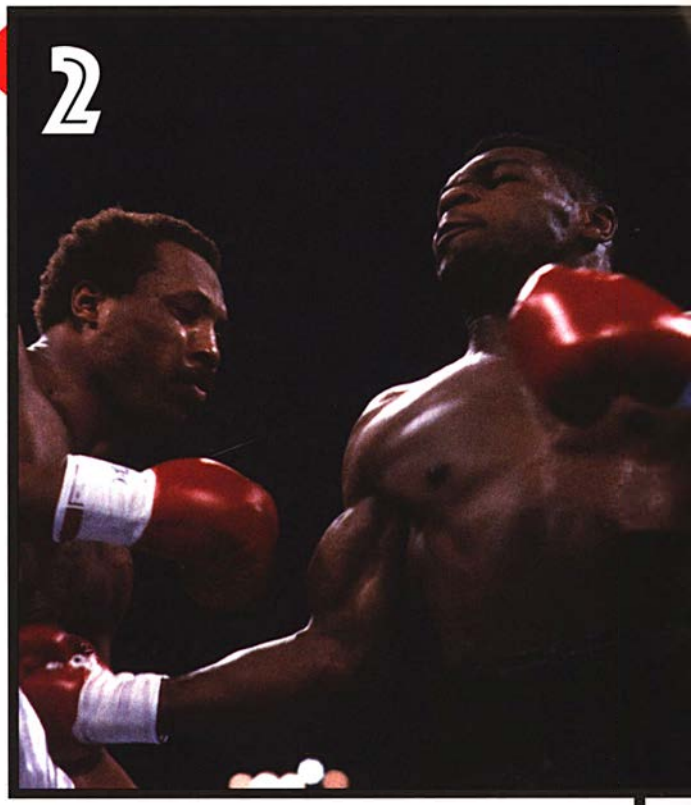
It was a powerful introduction to a 20-year-old Mike Tyson, and there's been nothing like him since. My friends were soon talking about boxing's youngest heavyweight titleholder as though he was *Jaws* on land, and over the next three years, the superpowered slugger feasted on the heavyweight division and left carnage behind him. Tyson wasn't viewed the same way that champions are today; he had the aura of a monster.

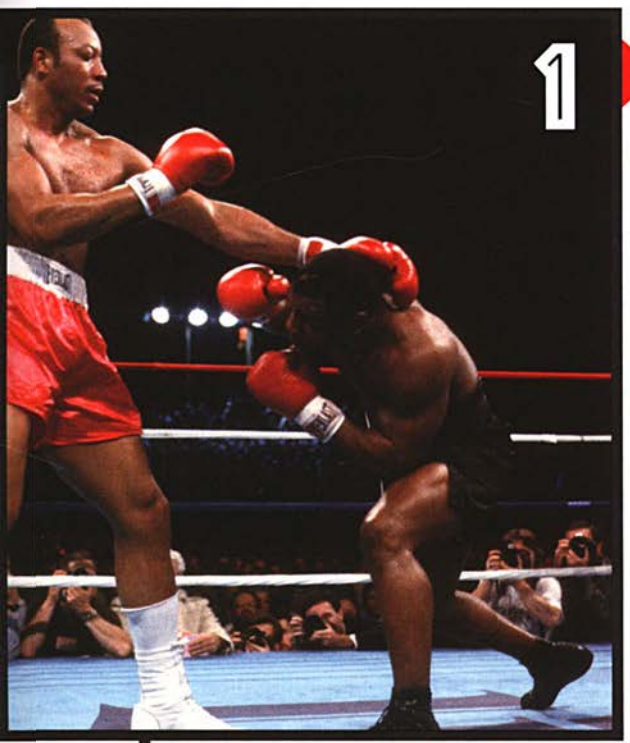
My memories of Tyson's title reign are a little hazy, but I watched most of his fights live, and having grown into a boxing superfreak, I've watched them several times since. This was an electrifying period in heavyweight history that saw Tyson emerge as the first undisputed champion in over a decade and, arguably, the most famous man in the world. It was a meteoric rise that made his subsequent fall from grace all the more unbelievable.

The following is a retrospective look at **TYSON'S FIRST 10 TITLE DEFENSES:**

When Larry Holmes began a gentle decline, Pinklon Thomas was considered by many to be the future of the heavyweight division. He was big, athletic, talented and possessed a skull-crushing left jab. Consistency was the problem. Thomas did manage to go unbeaten for 25 fights before dethroning Tim Witherspoon for the WBC title, and a one-punch knockout of Mike Weaver was a terrific statement. However, he wasn't active enough, and becoming champion was almost a distraction. Thomas lost the title to Berbick and knocked over three no-hopers before being offered a second world title shot. Eager to prove that the Smith waltz was an aberration, Tyson came out blazing. Crunching power shots exploded off Thomas' jaw throughout Round 1 and the challenger looked as though he'd been through a full 12-rounder at the end of the first three minutes. Thomas did manage to box his way back into the fight, but his offense was more pesky than powerful and it was just a matter of time. Tyson broke through again in the sixth with a left hook and went into full-on decapitation mode. A rocket right uppercut landed flush and a gutsy Thomas stayed erect long enough to absorb another four concussive shots to the jaw. He never contested for the title again.

RESULT: TYSON TKO 6





As 1986 drew to a close, Tyson versus Tim Witherspoon looked to be a distinct possibility. But things can change quickly in boxing. Witherspoon, then the WBA titleholder, was scheduled for a December 12 rematch against Tony Tubbs, the man he'd dethroned. However, a week prior to the bout, Tubbs withdrew, citing a shoulder injury, and he was hastily replaced by James "Bonecrusher" Smith at the behest of promoter Don King. Witherspoon, who had already beaten Smith on points, opposed the switch, stating that his preparation had been geared solely toward Tubbs. He was overruled. Smith took advantage of his opportunity, scoring a stunning first-round stoppage, which set the stage for a unification matchup with Tyson. Coming off a career-best win, one would have expected Smith, who had pushed Larry Holmes to the wire in a courageous 12th-round stoppage loss in 1984, to go all out for victory. Instead he fought to survive, displaying anemic offense while suffocating a frustrated Tyson in the clinches. Tyson won on aggression and prevailed via lopsided decision: 120-106, 119-107, 119-107.

RESULT: TYSON UD 12

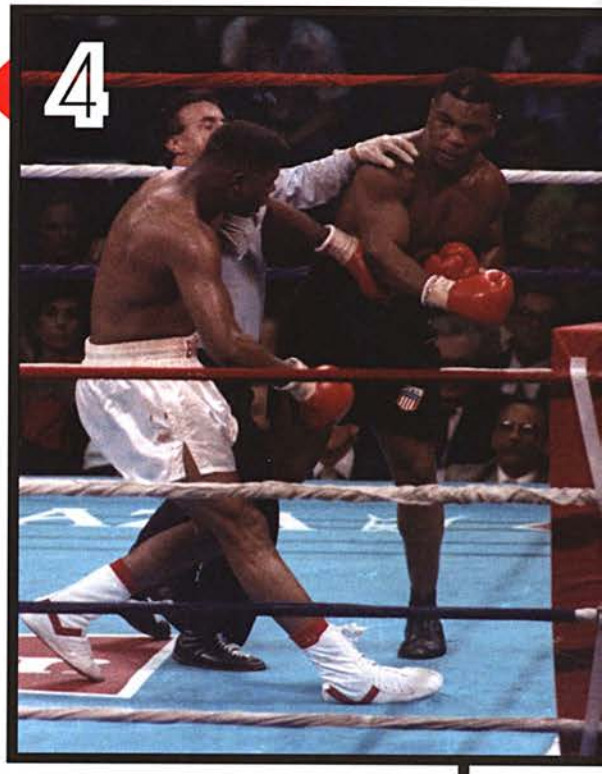
TALE OF THE TAPE

JAMES SMITH
March 7, 1987
Hilton Hotel
Outdoor Arena,
Las Vegas ★ World
Titles: WBA/WBC

« Mike Tyson smiles as he holds up his WBC "Boxer of the Year" award.

THE RING »
May 1987

PINKLON THOMAS
May 30, 1987
Hilton Hotel
Outdoor Arena,
Las Vegas ★ World
Titles: WBA/WBC



Tyrell Biggs was part of the star-studded U.S. Olympic team of 1984, which included Pernell Whitaker, Evander Holyfield, Meldrick Taylor, Mark Breland and Virgil Hill. His remarkable grace and stick-and-move style belied his tough Philadelphia roots, but Biggs had plenty going for him and captured super heavyweight gold. However, amateur glory doesn't always guarantee a smooth transition into the professional ranks. Biggs was a brilliant amateur but an incomplete pro. Tyson was a decent amateur and a complete pro. In the opening round, Biggs dazzled the crowd with a wonderful impersonation of Muhammad Ali footwork and a brisk jab. Tyson, however, was merely carrying out reconnaissance. As early as Round 2, he began butchering Biggs to the body and hammering home big left hooks over the low right hand of his opponent. The pattern was set, and Biggs' wheels were shot very quickly. Tyson produced a workmanlike performance, hurting Biggs on the inside, cutting him up and throwing in the odd elbow on the blind side of the referee. The left hook was the money punch, and that shot produced two knockdowns in the seventh round before the bout was called off.

RESULT: TYSON TKO 7

History states that Tyson mixed with some very ordinary heavyweights during his prime years, and while there is some truth to that, Tony Tucker was an excellent opponent. A top amateur, this native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, scooped gold at the 1979 Pan Am Games as a light heavyweight and was an alternate for the Moscow 1980 Olympics before those games were boycotted by the U.S. By the time he faced Tyson, Tucker, who stood 6-foot-5 and weighed 221 pounds, was unbeaten in 34 fights with 29 knockouts. In his previous outing, Tucker had also picked up the IBF title, which had been vacated by Michael Spinks, courtesy of a 10th-round stoppage of James "Buster" Douglas. He hadn't performed well, however, and would need a whole lot more to be competitive with Mike Tyson. The underdog certainly got off to a good start. Seconds into the bout, Tucker released a beautiful left uppercut that caught an onrushing Tyson flush and put him back on his heels. Tucker moved adeptly, showed no fear and took Tyson's best, round after round. By the midway point, however, Tucker's offense had dropped alarmingly and he was being outworked. Tyson pulverized the body and pulled away on points to earn himself a deserved decision win. Scores were 119-111, 118-113 and 117-112.

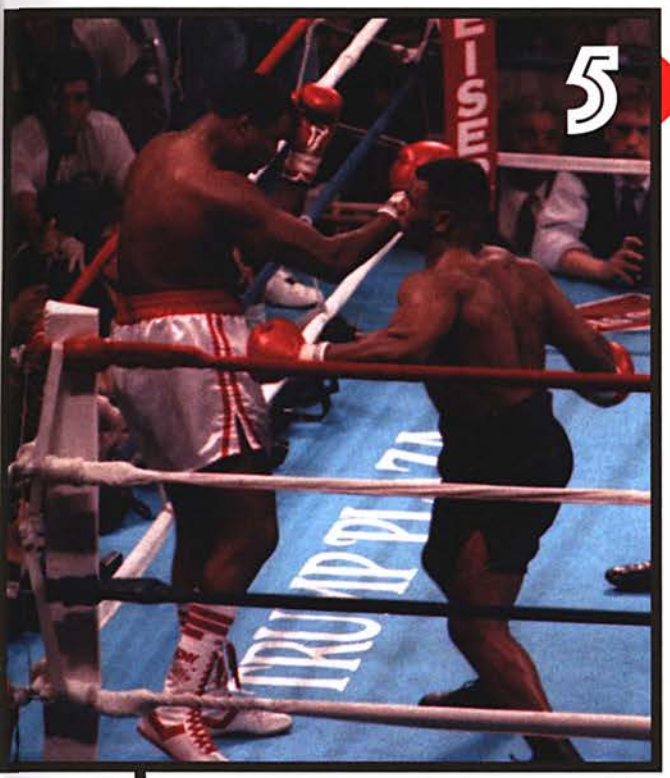
RESULT: TYSON UD 12

TALE OF THE TAPE

TONY TUCKER
August 1, 1987
Hilton Hotel, Las Vegas ✭ World Titles: IBF/WBA/WBC

« Tyson dressed in the trappings of royalty (provided by Don King) after winning against IBF titleholder Tony Tucker.

TYRELL BIGGS
October 16, 1987
Convention Hall, Atlantic City ✭ World Titles: IBF/WBA/WBC



Just as Joe Louis vs. Rocky Marciano and Muhammad Ali vs. Larry Holmes would have been best left in the fantasy section of heavyweight boxing, the same can be said of Tyson vs. Holmes. While Holmes may not have been as faded as Louis and Ali prior to their tragic defeats at the hands of younger men, he was nowhere near his best, and this event had the feel of a pending execution. The challenger was 38 years old and had been inactive for almost two years when he was lured out of retirement by promoter Don King and the scent of a cool $3 million. One could argue that it wasn't worth it. Holmes, a legendary ring general, did his best to nullify Tyson's work over the first three rounds and displayed his vaunted left jab and movement in the fourth. However, later in that session, Tyson landed a brutal right hook to the temple that knocked the veteran warrior off his feet. It's a mark of Holmes' amazing powers of recovery that he got up, but Tyson closed out with two more knockdowns, the last of which rendered the challenger unconscious. It was the only time in Holmes' 75-fight career that he was stopped.

RESULT: TYSON TKO 4

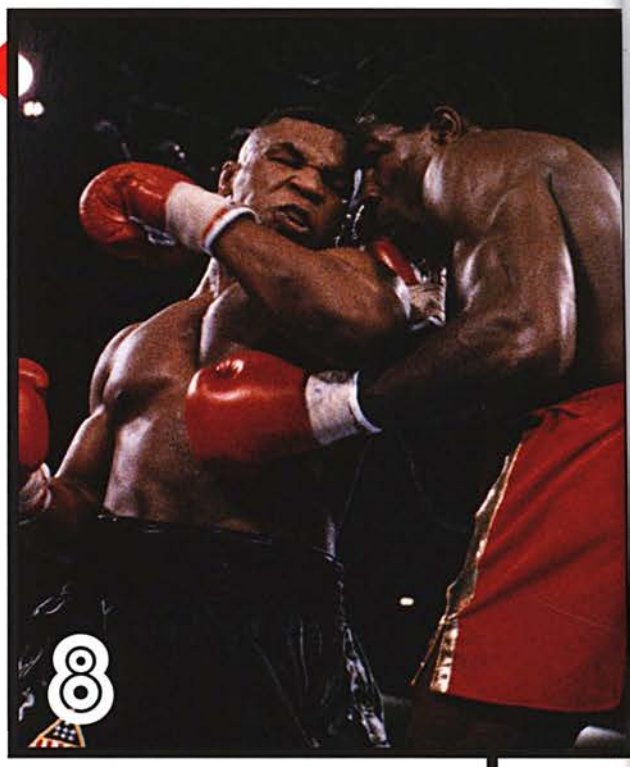
The quickfisted Tony Tubbs was a solid pro and a former WBA titleholder who held wins over "Bonecrusher" Smith and Greg Page. The slant on the Cincinnati technician was that he was more gym sloth than gym rat and carried his reputation around his waist. As HBO commentator Larry Merchant said during the buildup, "Tubbs has more ice cream in his belly than fire." However, the bout didn't last long enough for that ample midsection to be tested. Late in the second, Tyson got off his signature combination: a right hand to the body opened up Tubbs' guard just enough for a powerful right-hand uppercut to the chin. When Tubbs came off the ropes his equilibrium was off, and Tyson fired in a short left hook to the temple to compound the damage. Tubbs' 240-pound frame began to disassemble in sections as he slowly made his way downward. Luckily, a killer left hand from Tyson missed its mark as the challenger settled peacefully on the canvas. Trainer Odell Hadley sprinted into the ring to retrieve his fighter's mouthpiece and it was all over – no count necessary.

RESULT: TYSON TKO 2

LARRY HOLMES
January 22, 1988
Convention Center, Atlantic City ★
World Titles: IBF/WBA/WBC

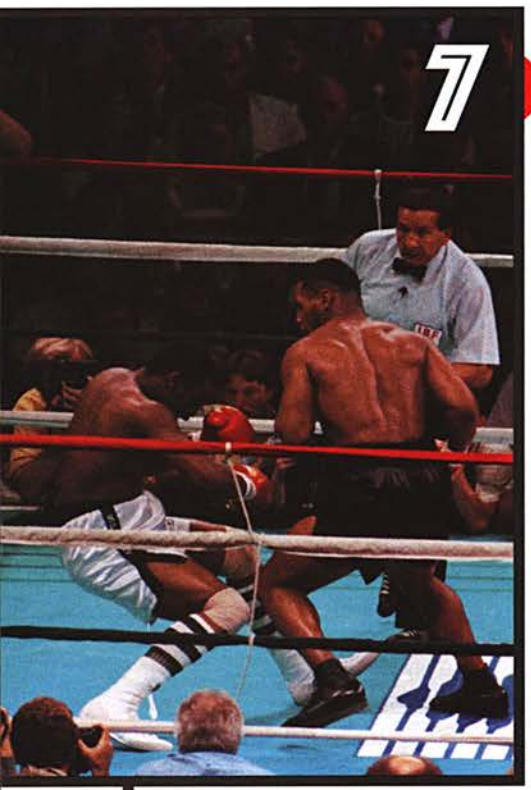
« FEB. 7, 1988: Marries actress Robin Givens.

TONY TUBBS
March 21, 1988
Tokyo Dome, Japan ★
World Titles: IBF/WBA/WBC



When Tyson entered the ring to face British hope Frank Bruno, everything around him was new. Don King was now solely in charge of his business affairs and trainer Kevin Rooney had been replaced by Aaron Snowell and Jay Bright. Tyson would later lament King's involvement in his career, but it was the trainer switch that produced visible changes in his form. Despite dropping Bruno in the opening seconds of the fight, the champion was wild, inaccurate, less focused on defense and more intent on throwing in singles. More alarmingly for his fans, however, was that Tyson was rocked by a three-punch salvo late in Round 1 and stunned again seconds later. Bruno was unable to capitalize on those moments, but Tyson looked truly vulnerable for the very first time. Slowly, the champion began to find some rhythm and he did a great job of breaking up Bruno's body in the early rounds. By the fifth, blood was pouring from the Londoner's nose and Tyson was plotting the finish. The famed right to the body-right uppercut to the jaw combo straightened Bruno up and two more sharp shots to the head prompted referee Richard Steele to save the challenger for another day.

RESULT: TYSON TKO 5

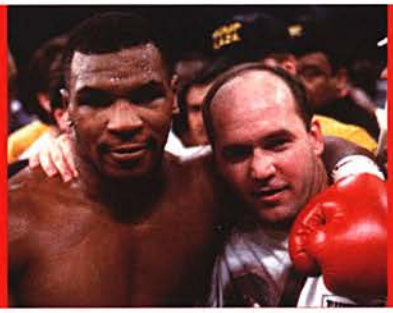


Michael Spinks had drifted into long periods of inactivity after becoming the first reigning light heavyweight champion to dethrone a heavyweight champion when he outpointed Larry Holmes. He had been stripped of the IBF title but was still recognized by The Ring. Between April 1986, when he scored a controversial rematch victory over Holmes, and June 1988, when he faced Tyson, Spinks fought only twice, knocking over the unheralded Steffen Tangstad and a semi-interested Gerry Cooney. In that same space of time, Tyson fought 15 times and decimated the division. What gave Spinks hope, however, was the chaos surrounding his opponent. Tyson's recent marriage to actress Robin Givens was already on the rocks, and there was a promotional power struggle at play between the fighter's manager, Bill Cayton, and Don King. But instead of being distracted, Tyson fed off the mayhem. A short left uppercut and a right to the body decked "The Jinx" in the second minute of Round 1. When Spinks rose, he elected to return fire and Tyson closed the show with a power-packed right hand to the head. It was all over in 91 seconds. With a guaranteed purse of $22 million, Tyson earned $241,758 per second, while Spinks, with a flat fee of $13.5 million, earned $148,352 per second.

RESULT: TYSON KO 1

TALE OF THE TAPE

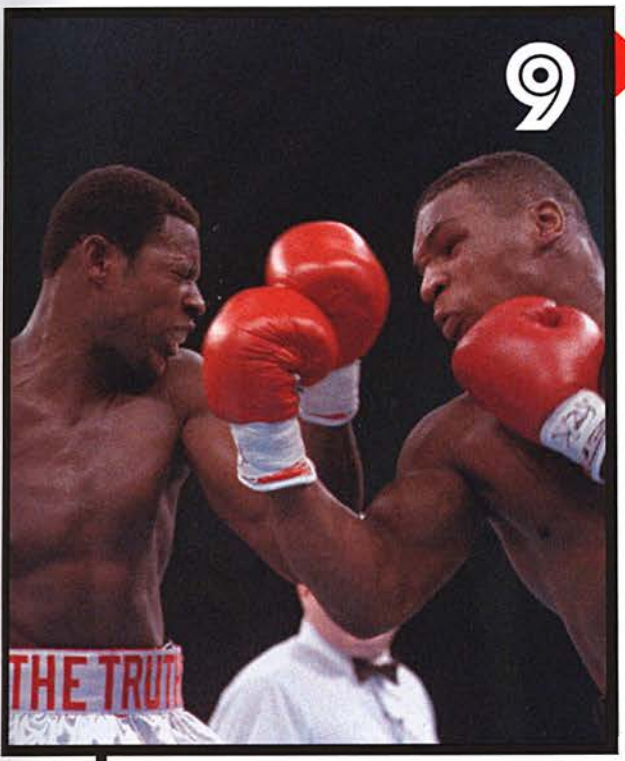
MICHAEL SPINKS
June 27, 1988
Convention Hall, Atlantic City ✭ World Titles: Undisputed



OCT. 7, 1988: Givens files for divorce.

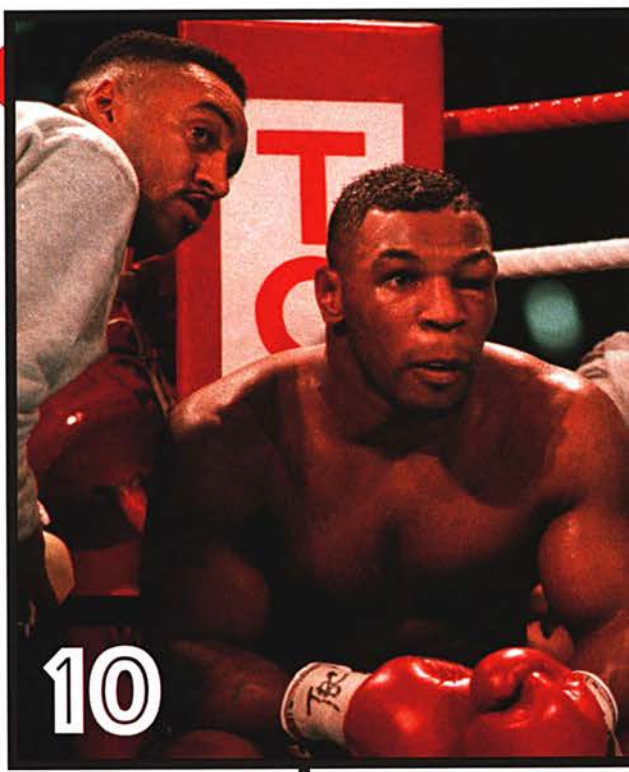
« DEC. 9, 1988: Fires trainer Kevin Rooney, breaking the last tie to the Cus D'Amato era of his career.

FRANK BRUNO
February 25, 1989
Hilton Hotel, Las Vegas ✭ World Titles: Undisputed



Everything was going well for Carl Williams early in his career. He was highly touted, and a close decision loss to then-champion Larry Holmes did more for his reputation than any of his previous victories. However, less than a year later, former titleholder Mike Weaver cleaned Williams out inside two rounds, and suddenly the colossal Floridian was viewed as fragile. A single left hook had turned the tide in the Weaver bout, and despite posting excellent comeback wins over Bert Cooper and Trevor Berbick, Williams' vulnerability to that shot was viewed as a serious problem against Tyson. And so it proved. Williams came out fast and looked to claim center ring as the champ, less anxious than he'd been against Bruno, looked him over. Williams scored with a quick left jab, but his right hand was six inches too low and Tyson spotted the gap. He slipped the follow-up jab and countered with a huge left hook to the jaw that dumped Williams on the seat of his pants. Tyson had rotated his hips, put everything into the punch, and the challenger looked like he'd seen a ghost when he struggled to his feet. Referee Randy Neumann stopped the fight with just 93 seconds gone.

RESULT: TYSON TKO 1



Mike Tyson entered the Tokyo Dome at the very peak of his fearsome reputation to face James "Buster" Douglas. He still owned every belt in the division and The Ring Magazine had officially named him as their first pound-for-pound No. 1. Douglas was considered a waste of talent, a fighter with all the physical tools – weight, height, reach, speed – but without the mental fortitude to back them up. Ahead against Tony Tucker in his first world title bout, Douglas fell apart late and was stopped. He'd put together a six-fight win streak since that setback, including points wins over Berbick and Oliver McCall, but Tyson was in a different league. Or so we thought. Fixated on winning following the tragic loss of his mother 23 days earlier, Douglas outboxed the lethargic champion in almost every round. The challenger was given a generously long count following a right uppercut knockdown in the eighth, but Douglas fought brilliantly. He closed out in the 10th when a devastating right uppercut set up a three-punch combination for the first knockdown of Tyson's career. Referee Octavio Meyran completed the 10-count and history was made. It remains the single biggest upset in boxing history.

RESULT: DOUGLAS KO 10

CARL WILLIAMS
July 21, 1989
Convention Center, Atlantic City ★ World Titles: Undisputed

« Mike Tyson shows off his winnings after defeating Carl Williams.

THE RING »
FEB. 1990

JAMES "BUSTER" DOUGLAS
February 11, 1990
Tokyo Dome, Japan
★ Titles: Undisputed

Mike Tyson didn't need much time to dispatch built-up club fighter Peter McNeeley, his first post-prison opponent.

THE SECOND COMING:

1995-1997

FOLLOWING THREE YEARS IN PRISON, TYSON'S RETURN TO THE RING WAS A DASH TO CASH IN ON HIS NOTORIETY – AND IT WOULDN'T LAST LONG

By **Michael Rosenthal**

The Mike Tyson who walked out of the Indiana Youth Center, a prison in the Indianapolis suburb of Plainfield, on March 26, 1995, was no longer the dynamo who captivated the world by knocking out one terrified opponent after another en route to becoming the youngest heavyweight champion at 20 years old. That man was gone. Forever.

This Tyson, 28, was bitter over his conviction on charges of raping a beauty pageant contestant in 1991 that sent him away for three years. To this day, he denies he did it. And he trusted only a few people close to him.

"I hate everybody," he told boxing writer Nigel Collins, who interviewed him at the correctional facility for a Ring Magazine story.

Some hated him right back. For example, Gloria Allred, the high-powered women's rights attorney, was appalled that a convicted and unrepentant rapist could simply climb back into the ring and resume his lucrative career as if nothing happened to Desiree Washington, Tyson's victim.

Allred had me on her radio show to discuss that topic. I told her and those listening that I believed a person who pays his or her debt to society – even after such a horrific crime – has the right to earn a living, Tyson being no exception. She wasn't convinced.

Others were able to set the conviction aside, whatever their reasons might be. They were focused on Mike Tyson the wrecking ball. They relived in their minds the intoxicating excitement he had generated with his ferocity and punching power, and they craved more. That's why Tyson could expect to make many millions upon his return. And he did.

This was the backdrop when Tyson regained his freedom and embarked on a comeback that commanded the attention of a fascinated world. It lasted only six fights.

One of many questions people were asking upon Tyson's release from prison centered on his physical condition.

Reports varied. Some suggested he had wasted away, weighing as little as 185 pounds. Rev. Charles Williams, a local resident who had visited regularly while Tyson was incarcerated, said his friend weighed closer to 210 pounds, only four pounds less than he weighed for his final pre-prison fight against Razor Ruddock in June 1991.

Tyson tried to stay in shape by doing push-ups and sit-ups, lifting

AL BELLO

Tyson indulged in eccentric luxuries, but he could afford them as boxing's reigning pay-per-view king.

weights – anything he could without proper boxing equipment. Outsiders offered to provide the tools Tyson was accustomed to using, but prison officials wouldn't allow it.

"We used to have a heavy punching bag, but people kept hurting or breaking their hands using it, so we had it removed," Phil Slavens, the prison's associate superintendent, said at the time.

And there were more far-reaching questions. Could he possibly have maintained the quickness and reflexes he brought with him when he entered prison in 1992? Or was it reasonable to assume the earlier version of Tyson was history? Muhammad Ali returned from a 3½-year hiatus and relied more on guile and toughness than the remarkable athleticism of his youth. He also was 28.

Of course, the world would have to see Tyson fight to get answers. And that was swiftly arranged.

Don King, who would orchestrate this portion of Tyson's career, wanted a palatable, ideally charismatic opponent who had absolutely no chance of derailing this train as it left the station. And he found the perfect man for the job: Peter McNeeley. McNeeley had a gaudy record (36-1, 31 KOs) built against nobodies. He had a decent backstory. His grandfather fought in the 1928 Olympics and his father, Tom McNeeley, once challenged Floyd Patterson for the heavyweight title.

And, most importantly, he couldn't fight. As rival promoter Bob Arum put it, "You have to understand, [Tyson is] fighting somebody even I can beat."

Tyson's post-prison persona became evident in the lead-up to the McNeeley fight. Sullen. Unpredictable. Sometimes volatile. Only occasionally thoughtful. He made a lot of people around him uncomfortable.

One example: At the final press conference, King announced for the world to hear that Tyson would make $25 million for the fight, to which the promoter's cash cow responded by grabbing King's arm, glaring at him and asking, "Why are you telling them my business?"

Tyson seemed to be joking at the moment but, according to The Associated Press, he said in a later interview that it bothered him.

"It doesn't help when Don King is running his mouth telling people how much money I make," he said in one of his thoughtful moments. "It makes them resentful." He went on: "You can never trust anyone. I feel they're all out to get me. I'm just very paranoid about things and people."

Said Tim Smith, who covered Tyson for the New York Daily News: "His relationship with King was beginning to deteriorate after he got out of prison. King had installed Rory Holloway and John Horne as Tyson's managers. They wanted to insulate him from everyone, including the press, so that King could keep a firm grip on his top earner. Horne created an adversarial relationship with the press and Tyson played his role perfectly.

"He was mistrustful of almost everyone. And rightfully so, because people had taken advantage of him for most of his life."

Blow-by-blow broadcaster Steve Albert of Showtime called 15 of Tyson's final 16 fights, one for HBO Pay-Per-View. He doesn't have fond memories of that period.

"It was a trying time for everyone involved," he told me. "There was no broadcast training in the world that could prepare a play-by-play or blow-by-blow announcer for this kind of environment. I always tried to keep the mood light and humorous in production meetings, fighter meetings, just generally being around the broadcast crew who were a great bunch of people, but when I got to the site of a Tyson fight, the mood was different. I remember thinking, 'It's not supposed to be like this.' But we made the best of it."

The McNeeley fight was part sporting event and part circus. I'll never forget McNeeley's ring walk as a packed crowd of 16,000-plus buzzed with anticipation. His skin had a greenish hue, which screamed one thing to me: The 22-1 underdog was in way over his head and knew it. He was terrified.

Tyson, out of the ring for 50 months, was cheered wildly as he made his way into the ring. So much for the rape conviction. And before anyone could settle into their uncomfortable seats, it was over.

McNeeley attacked Tyson at the opening bell, to his credit, only to be met by a right hand that put him down seconds into the fight. He got up and continued to take the fight to Tyson until he was down again and hurt by a right uppercut. He was glassy-eyed and unsteady on his feet when his manager, Vinnie Vecchione, entered the ring to save his fighter from life-threatening damage. Referee Mills Lane had no choice but to disqualify McNeeley.

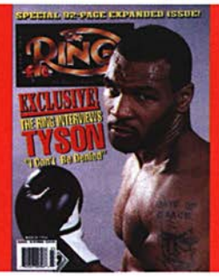
Tyson's comeback fight lasted 89 seconds, prompting Michael Hirsley of the Chicago Tribune to dub it a "tour de farce."

Reporters at the post-fight press conference who asked about the legitimacy of the matchup were met

TALE OF THE TAPE:

« DEC. 16,1995: Beat Buster Mathis Jr. by KO at 2:32 in Round 3.

THE RING » MARCH 1996



MARCH 16,1996: » Beat Frank Bruno by TKO at 0:50 in Round 3.

« THE RING AUG. 1996

« SEPT. 7, 1996: Beat Bruce Seldon by TKO at 1:49 in Round 1.

NOV. 9, 1996: » Lost to Evander Holyfield by TKO at 0:37 in Round 11.

by a terse response from the acerbic Horne, who said, "Don't deny Mike the right to cash in on the bigger-than-life image you in the media have given him."

Tyson was back. He was a lot richer than he was before the fight. And he was only getting started in the second phase of his career.

The McNeeley fight told us almost nothing about where Tyson stood as a fighter, other than he still had the ability to hurt an opponent. His second fight in the comeback, against Buster Mathis Jr. on December 16, 1995, in Philadelphia, was expected to provide more information.

The unbeaten Mathis (20-0, 6 KOs) was no world-beater, but he was a significant step up from McNeeley. He couldn't punch – as his knockout percentage indicated – but he could box a little. And the son of a former contender by the same name wasn't intimidated by Tyson, at least not outwardly.

"If you don't fall into his traps, he's an ordinary fighter," Mathis said at the time. "I'm serious. When he was 20, 21 years old, he was devastating. I don't see that guy anymore."

Mathis was stopped at 2 minutes, 32 seconds of Round 3.

That's all it took – one joke, one easy knockout – for King to maneuver Tyson into a title fight against a familiar face, Frank Bruno, the popular British fighter whom a prime Tyson had stopped in five rounds in February 1989, eight months after his 91-second demolition of Michael Spinks.

Bruno, a proven veteran who had outpointed Oliver McCall to win the WBC belt, should've been a challenge for Tyson. Instead, he showed up at the MGM Grand on March 16, 1996, armed only with fear. His ring walk brought back memories of McNeeley's slog toward his demise, only more penitent. Bruno must've crossed himself a hundred times before he stepped through the ropes, as if he were pleading with God, "Please don't let this be my time to join you."

Back-to-back losses to Evander Holyfield ended Tyson's second title reign.

A frightened opponent never had a chance against Tyson. Bruno went out 50 seconds into Round 3.

And just like that, Tyson was again a heavyweight champion of the world, although he had to share that distinction with Bruce Seldon, who held the WBA title at that time. George Foreman had vacated the IBF title.

Tyson's next opponent: Seldon on September 7, 1996, at the MGM Grand. I spent fight week in Las Vegas. Seldon (33-3, 29 KOs) struck me as someone who was completely relaxed because he believed in himself and had no fear of Tyson, which led me to believe he actually had a chance to give Tyson some resistance.

Then the opening bell sounded and it looked as if Seldon wanted to be anywhere else. He went down from a right that skipped off the top of his head and then hit the canvas again courtesy of a left hook. Fight over. It lasted 1 minute, 49 seconds.

None of Tyson's post-prison opponents had made it out of the third round, which made it difficult to compare him to a prime version of himself. He looked the same physically, he maintained much of his athleticism and the power certainly was there. Still, it was going to take a genuine challenge to determine exactly what Tyson had left.

That would come in his next fight.

Evander Holyfield, who had gotten to know Tyson when they were amateurs in the early 1980s, was twice on the verge of fighting his rival before he actually did. Tyson's meeting with Buster Douglas was meant as a tune-up for a fight with Holyfield in 1990. We know what happened there. And a showdown was in the works when Tyson was sent to prison.

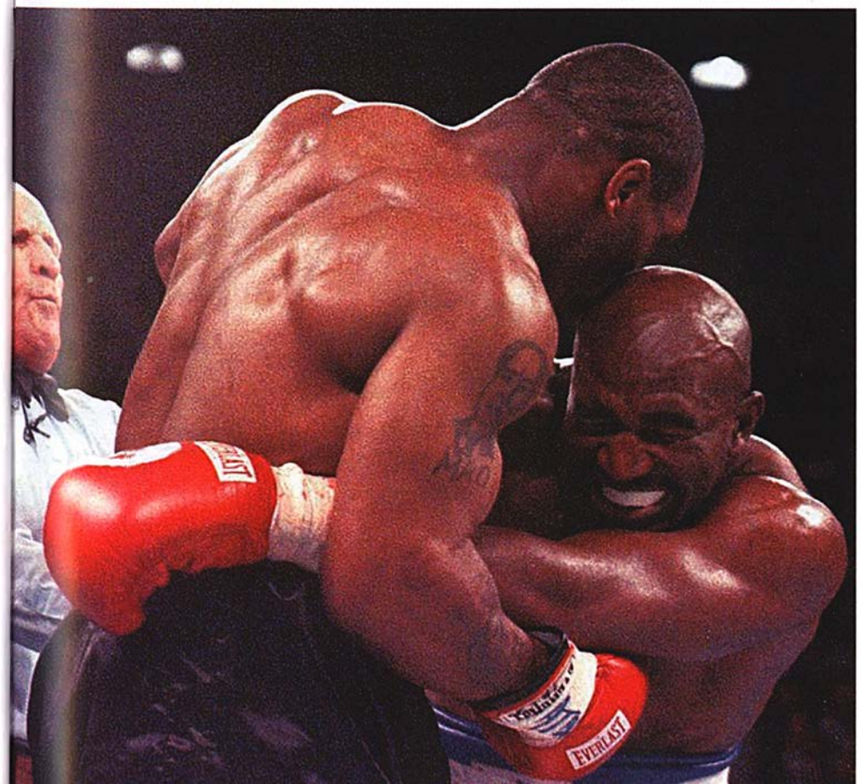
The Holyfield who ultimately shared a ring with Tyson seemed to be in decline at 34 years old. He had lost two heavyweight belts to Michael Moorer in April 1994, after which he was diagnosed with a heart condition that forced him to "retire," only to come back months later after receiving a clean bill of health at the Mayo Clinic. That has never been fully explained.

He was one fight removed from a knockout loss to Riddick Bowe, the first of only two times he was stopped. And, in his most recent fight, some suggested he looked shot in a fifth-round knockout victory over Bobby Czyz at Madison Square Garden. I was at ringside. I remember thinking, "He can't pull the trigger on his punches." Bad sign.

That's one reason Holyfield was as much as a 25-1 underdog against Tyson, whose knockouts over mediocre opponents evidently convinced oddsmakers that he had more than enough left to take care of a faded Holyfield. In a poll of 48 boxing writers – supposed experts – 47 picked Tyson to win. Only Ron Borges of the Boston Globe predicted Holyfield would prevail.

And of course he was right. Holyfield might not have been in his prime, but he fought as if he was, standing up to everything Tyson threw at him and dishing out even more in what evolved into a beatdown.

The Holyfield rematch resulted in Tyson's most infamous bout: "The Bite Fight."



Holyfield hurt a weary Tyson badly in the final seconds of Round 10 and finished the job with a fearful barrage that prompted referee Mitch Halpern to stop the fight 37 seconds into Round 11.

"My choice of Holyfield over Tyson was always quite firm," Borges told me recently. "I would have picked him had they fought earlier as well. Why? Several reasons. Unlike most of the opponents Tyson fought, Holyfield was never intimidated by him, dating back to their amateur days. They had a hellacious sparring session once as amateurs that (U.S. Olympic Coach) Pat Nappi finally had to stop because it was a gym war. While at the Olympic developmental camp in Colorado Springs before the '84 games, there was an incident when a bunch of the fighters were playing pool. Winner kept the table. Loser gave up the stick. Tyson lost but refused to give up his cue to Holyfield, who was next up. Holyfield, I was told, went up and took it out of his hand without saying a word. Tyson went off to his room for the night.

"I always felt because of those things Tyson was intimidated by Holyfield, who he knew would stand up to him. If he couldn't get him out early, which seemed unlikely to me because of Holyfield's chin and resolve, Tyson would break down."

Tyson was never a dominating fighter again. We all know what happened in the rematch with Holyfield on June 28, 1997, in the same MGM Grand arena. Angry over what he believed were Holyfield's dirty tactics in the first fight and perhaps desperate to avoid another beating, Tyson gnawed off a portion of Holyfield's ear and then bit the other one to earn a disqualification and an exalted place in sports infamy.

And by 1998, most of Tyson's money was gone – more than $200 million he'd earned in purses, TV and casino deals in the two years since he left prison, according to The Associated Press. He'd spent it on mansions, cars, jewelry, gifts and whatever else caught his eye, including a Bengal tiger. Those around him also received their share: King, Horne and Holloway took 50 percent of everything Tyson made, AP reported. On top of that, he owed the IRS millions in back taxes.

"I'm not tight with a dollar," Tyson said. "I'm very frivolous at times."

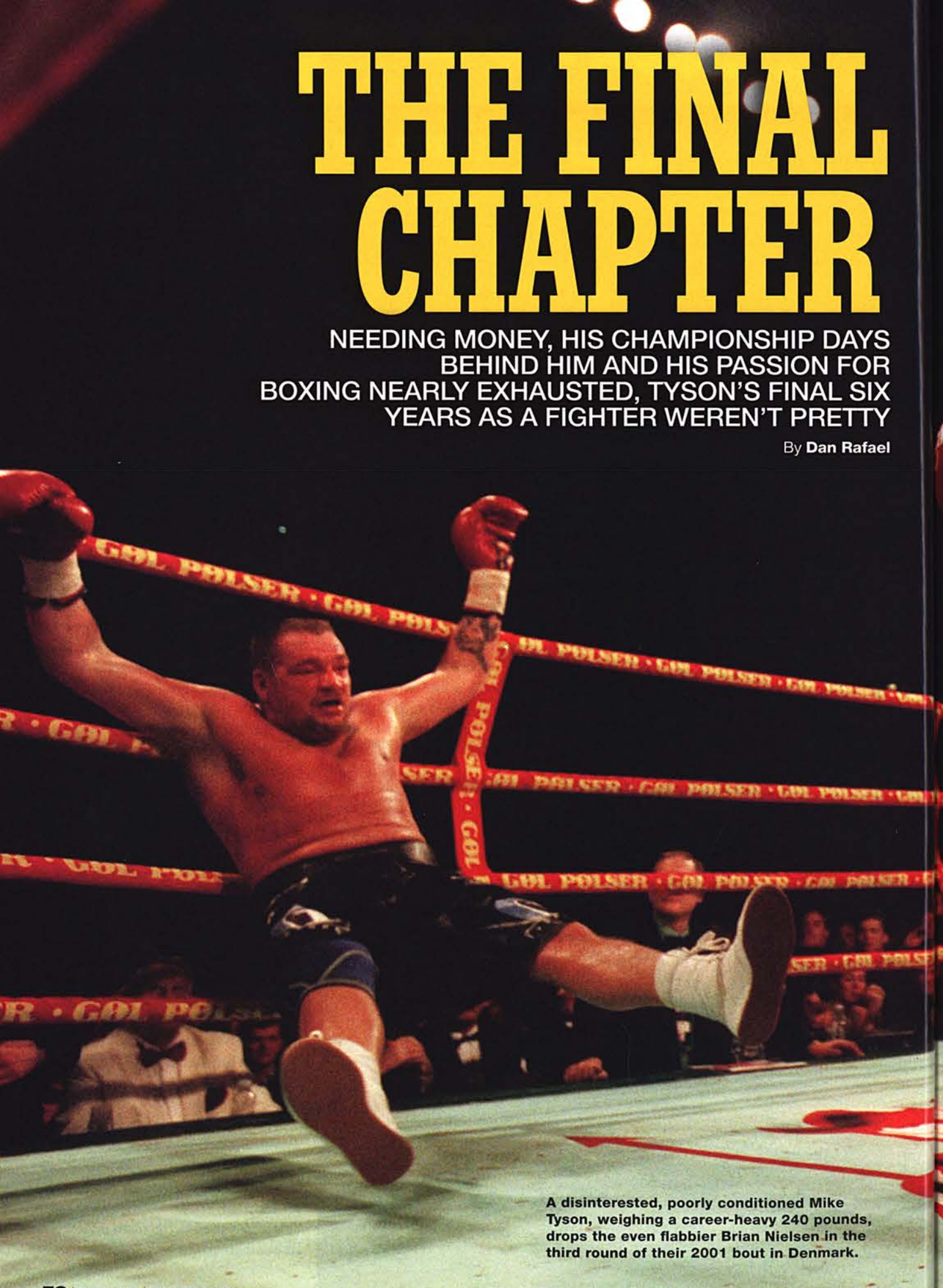
Gone was his heavyweight title. Gone was his boxing career, as he was suspended indefinitely by the Nevada State Athletic Commission for his behavior in the ear-bite fight. Gone was most of the money he earned. He would soon split from King, Horne and Holloway. And his behavior would only become more bizarre after his career resumed, the best example being the day he bit Lennox Lewis on the leg and was suspended again. He seemed to be spinning out of control.

It would be many years before Tyson was able to defeat his demons. I remember a phone interview I had with him about a decade ago. I said to him, "Mike, we all thought you'd either be in jail or dead by now." He responded, "So did I."

THE FINAL CHAPTER

NEEDING MONEY, HIS CHAMPIONSHIP DAYS BEHIND HIM AND HIS PASSION FOR BOXING NEARLY EXHAUSTED, TYSON'S FINAL SIX YEARS AS A FIGHTER WEREN'T PRETTY

By **Dan Rafael**



A disinterested, poorly conditioned Mike Tyson, weighing a career-heavy 240 pounds, drops the even flabbier Brian Nielsen in the third round of their 2001 bout in Denmark.

The end is rarely pretty for professional athletes, especially boxers, whose skills and often desire have eroded over the years. That was the case for Mike Tyson, who saw the final chapter of his career marked by ongoing chaos, controversy and a collapse of his ability.

Tyson had built his legend off a string of sensational knockouts leading up to and during his first title reign, which began at age 20 as the youngest heavyweight champion ever.

Even after Tyson was disqualified and suspended for biting off a chunk of Evander Holyfield's ear in their 1997 title rematch, he remained must-see TV when he returned, though now the reason wasn't so much because of his talent.

Instead, millions remained blinded by their adoration of him and the memory of what he once was and the dream that he might one day land another thunderous punch to make him champion

again, even if he was now Mike Tyson in name only, more shell than comet.

From his return from the ear-bite suspension in 1999 through the end of his career in 2005, the Tyson circus carried on for 10 more fights. Whatever bizarre incident that might occur before or after an event was as anticipated as the violence inside the ring.

There were four trainers (Tommy Brooks, Ronnie Shields, Freddie Roach and Jeff Fenech), three European fights, three knockout losses, two no-contests, one incarceration and one last shot at the title. Through it all, Tyson remained a draw wherever he went.

"He was probably the most recognizable person in the world at that time, and wherever we traveled in the world it was chaos," said Shelly Finkel, who managed Tyson for his final 10 bouts. "In the U.K., they tried to rip the doors off the limo we had waiting for us at the airport. When we went to Denmark, they shut [down] the mall [we were in] because the crowds were just storming it. When we went to Manchester, they stopped the bus we were on and police took us off because of the crowd by the hotel. When we went to Brixton (in London), the crowds were so big the police came in on horses and lifted him up and put him onto a horse to take him out of the crowd."

As much as Tyson reveled in the attention, he didn't really want to fight. He freely admitted he was in it for the money, which he needed to pay off a mountain of tax debt, and to continue living the high life. He said after retiring he hadn't had true hunger to fight since his 1991 rematch with Razor Ruddock.

When a worn-out Tyson retired on his stool against Kevin McBride, Tyson knew he was finally done.

"I didn't feel bad or nothing at all, just that what's over is over," Tyson told me during a half-hour interview following the McBride fight.

Tyson showed a gamut of emotions – mellow, witty, sad, philosophical and happy – during that session, but this was clear: He was at peace and his tumultuous career was done.

"I just don't have the desire to fight no more," he said. "I wasn't truly into it. If you're a fighter, your heart has to be in it more than your physical attributes. There's nothing like the fighting heart, and I don't have the fighting heart for that kind of work.

"I don't know that person anymore, that guy in '86, '87. I don't have no affinity for that guy no more. I have no affinity for the guy who said, 'I am the greatest fighter God produced.' I have no affinity for the guy who said he would try to push his [opponent's] nose bone up into his brain. I just don't know that guy. I don't know who he is. I don't know where he came from. I don't have no kind of connection with him no more."

While the fights in the final chapter of Tyson's career won't be recalled with the kind of awe as his title days, he still drew huge crowds and pay-per-view buys. Nineteen months after he bit Holyfield, Tyson was back with an all-new team in Brooks, Finkel and promoter Dan Goossen, who arranged a fight with fringe contender Frans Botha for January 1999.

Tyson's rust was evident, and for four rounds it was all Botha. Tyson also resorted to dirty tactics in the final seconds of the first round by trying to break Botha's arm during a clinch. Referee Richard Steele tried to separate them, and eventually the corners and security rushed the ring to assist. Tyson, way behind, continued to fight dirty but in the fifth found the old power, landing a perfect right hand for the knockout.

After the rust-covered win, Tyson was idle for nine months, but not because of injuries or trouble finalizing a fight. Instead, two weeks after the Botha bout, he was sentenced to a year in jail after pleading no contest in a road-rage incident from August 1998 in which he assaulted two men following a minor traffic accident in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Tyson was released after four months and soon his next fight was set for October 1999 against former cruiserweight titleholder Orlin Norris. The fight was forgettable, though there was a bizarre ending as Tyson nailed Norris with a punch after the bell ending the first round. Norris collapsed, twisting his right knee as he hit the mat. Steele docked Tyson two points, but when Norris said he couldn't continue, the fight was declared a no-contest.

With a near disqualification against Botha and the late punch against Norris, Tyson had worn out his welcome in Las Vegas and hit the road for three of his next four fights in Europe, where he fought twice in 2000. He needed two rounds to obliterate England's Julius Francis in Manchester, England, and 38 seconds for American Lou Savarese in Glasgow, Scotland.

Tyson behaved against Francis, scoring five knockdowns, but not so much against Savarese, whom he said he only trained two weeks for. As Tyson teed off after quickly flooring Savarese with a left, referee John Coyle intervened, but even with the referee stopping it, Tyson kept swinging. He knocked Coyle over and continued to pound Savarese until the corners and Coyle pulled him away.

Far more memorable than the bout was Tyson's deranged post-fight interview with Showtime's Jim Gray, during which Tyson famously went off on then-champion Lennox Lewis, the opponent the world wanted to see him face.

"I'm just ferocious. I want your heart. I want to eat his children," Tyson ranted about Lewis, who didn't yet have children.

In his third European fight, Tyson bloodied and battered Brian Nielsen in a sixth-round stoppage on Nielsen's turf in Copenhagen, Denmark, in October 2001. It was a fight Tyson took after one against David Izon, planned for June 2001, was scrapped in an attempt to match Tyson with Hasim Rahman, who had dethroned Lewis in a massive upset. But after legal maneuvering, Lewis got his rematch with Rahman and Tyson was left to face Nielsen.

Between the Savarese and Nielsen fights, Tyson returned to the U.S. to face mercurial former title challenger Andrew Golota in October 2000 outside of Detroit in a match between

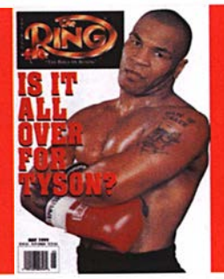
Whether pure theater or genuine concern, a wall of security guards brought an extra level of menace to the Lewis fight.

ABOVE: JOHN ; LEFT: MARK WILSON; NORRIS: CHRIS FARINA GIOHIGI

TALE OF THE TAPE

« FEB. 5, 1999: Sentenced to a year in jail related to a road-rage incident from August 1998.

THE RING » MAY 1999



OCT. 23, 1999: » Knocks down Orlin Norris in the first round, but the result is a no-contest after Norris injures his knee.

two of boxing's bad boys. Thomas Hearns co-promoted the fight, and Tyson was hostile in the buildup.

He did only one pre-fight print interview – with me when I covered boxing for USA Today. It was a disaster and resulted in a headline stretched across the sports section the day before the fight: "Full-force Tyson: I hate everybody."

He made multiple threats on my life, railed against the media, white people and Don King, his former promoter. Despite his sour mood, Tyson looked good blowing out Golota, whom he dropped with a right hand and cut over the left eye in the first round. After taking more punishment in the second, Golota quit.

The ring was pelted with debris from angry fans, and Tyson's win was soon erased, changed to a no-contest because of a positive marijuana test. Tyson, whose pot-smoking was never much of a secret – he now owns a cannabis farm – was also fined $250,000.

"James Toney was on steroids (when he beat John Ruiz). When he won the title on steroids, he got fined $10,000 (in New York)," Tyson told me in 2005. "I smoked weed and was fined $250,000. I smoked weed and won. That's a dehancing drug. Steroids are an enhancing drug. How do I get fined $250,000 for weed and he gets $10,000 for steroids? I can't say racism because it was a black city (Detroit) that got my ass. I should have got caught in a white place like Las Vegas."

With Tyson knocking out Nielsen and Lewis doing the same to Rahman a month later to regain the title in late 2001, it finally set the stage for boxing's biggest fight. There were issues, though, including a complicated deal to be hammered out by rival networks HBO (which had an exclusive deal with Lewis) and Showtime (which had Tyson under contract). There was also the infamous New York press conference to announce an April showdown in Las Vegas that never happened because during the intros, Tyson stormed at Lewis and incited a melee, during which he bit Lewis' leg.

Because of the incident, Nevada refused to license Tyson, and it set off a scramble to amend the contracts and find a site. Eventually, Memphis agreed to host the fight, which was set for June 8, 2002. The city welcomed the world and staged a weeklong party ahead of the big fight, with the boxers kept apart the entire week: separate news conferences and weigh-ins. Even on fight night there was a phalanx of security guards standing in line across the ring to keep order.

Tyson looked good in the first round, but Lewis got going in the second and cut Tyson in the third. From there, it was batting practice.

Tyson's KO loss to British gatekeeper Danny Williams shocked his fans.

Tyson took a beating. He was no match for the skill and power of the champion. Battered and bleeding, Tyson finally got knocked out in the eighth round of his final world title fight, which set the all-time pay-per-view record for the day.

Shields, in his only assignment as Tyson's trainer, said his fighter was in good shape and good spirits going in.

"He gave it all he had. He went in there to win. He didn't go in there to lie down," Shields said. "We were hoping Mike could touch him and hurt him. That's what we were hoping for that night, but of course we didn't get that. I thought he was going to retire after the fight."

Of course, Tyson didn't retire.

"After Lennox, there were a few more fights for the money and then it was time to pack it in," Finkel said.

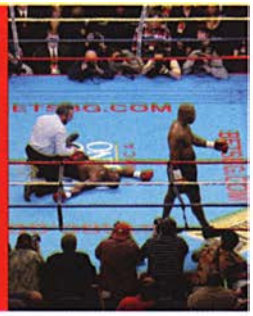
Tyson declined a rematch with Lewis, returning eight months later, also in Memphis. Now trained by

TALE OF THE TAPE:

« OCT. 20, 2000: Beats Andrew Golota but later tests positive for marijuana and the fight result is changed to NC.

THE RING »
MARCH 2002

FEB. 22, 2003: » Beat Clifford Etienne by KO at 0:49 in Round 1.



Roach, who lasted two fights, Tyson faced glass-jawed Clifford Etienne in what turned out to be his 50th and final win. Tyson needed just 49 seconds to ice Etienne with a right hand in a fight whose pre-fight controversy centered on Tyson having gotten his now-iconic facial tattoo.

Tyson didn't fight again for 17 months due to legal issues and bankruptcy, and when he did, he met England's Danny Williams in Louisville, Kentucky, birthplace of Muhammad Ali. Fighting in Freedom Hall, where Ali turned pro in 1960, Tyson was a huge favorite with an $80 million promotional deal on the table from Top Rank's Bob Arum, had he won. But Tyson tore a knee ligament in the first round and Williams unleashed around 25 unanswered punches in the fourth round to floor the bloodied former champ and knock him out in a huge upset.

The end came in June 2005 in Washington, D.C., where the 38-year-old Tyson quit after the sixth round against McBride, a 6-foot-6, 271-pound painfully slow journeyman he was expected to destroy.

More than 15,000 jammed the arena expecting a Tyson knockout in the city's biggest fight in years. Instead, they saw the final curtain drawn. Tyson had little against McBride. Referee Joe Cortez deducted two points from Tyson in the sixth round for headbutts Tyson later said were intentional. As the sixth ended, Tyson went down without being hit. Cortez ruled it was a slip, but it was clear the exhausted Tyson didn't want to continue. He slowly got to his feet and trudged to his stool. After a few words with Fenech (their only fight together), the trainer stopped it.

"I don't think he had the spark he had earlier, and that's when he hung it up," Finkel said. "He told me before the McBride fight, 'You know, I don't really have it.' And he just didn't have the flame like he had before."

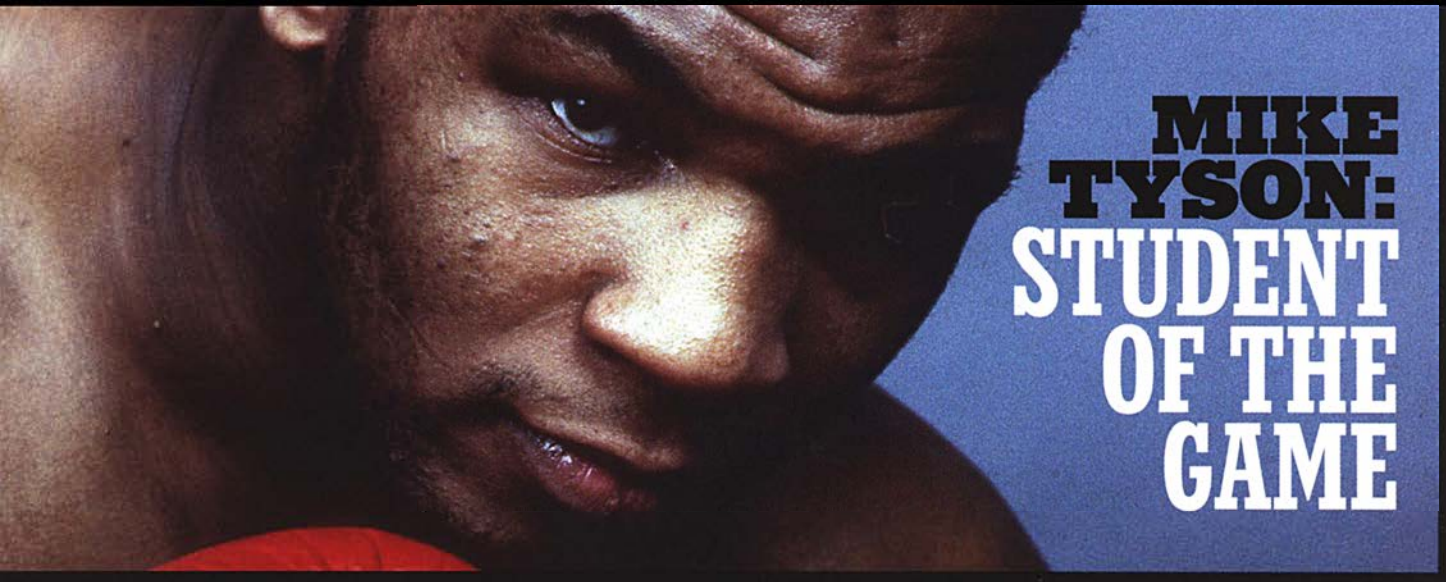
After 58 fights and 215 rounds, it was finally over, and there was a palpable sense of relief from Tyson.

He said during our post-news conference interview that for years he'd only boxed because "it was profitable and I was just caught up in the lifestyle. Everybody knew it was over. I'm not lying. You know it. You've been around me. We all know the deal. Don't feel sorry for me. It is what it is.

"There comes a time in your life where you really don't care about this business no more and it's time for the younger guys to do it. I was just so happy to quit. I was just tired of doing this for so long. I'm just happy not to do it no more."

Tyson knew his fighting days were done after the Kevin McBride fight.

PAUL J. RICHARDS



MIKE TYSON: STUDENT OF THE GAME

"IRON MIKE" LOOKS BACK AT 10 OF THE LEGENDARY HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONS WHO CAME BEFORE HIM

By **Tom Gray**

He didn't move – he barely blinked.

The young fighter sat in a dark room watching reel after reel of fight film. As hard as he worked in the gym to perfect his craft, this process of watching great former champions show their wares was equally important. What if he looked away and missed something? What if he missed a feint, a pivot, a subtle move on the inside, a specific combination? What if he missed an attractive characteristic that one of those great old fighters possessed and failed to manifest it in his own personality? He was stoic, focused, single-minded, and the reflection of the white light from the screen danced in his dreaming eyes.

One day it would be him.

Mike Tyson was thoroughly obsessed by the boxing game and its legendary practitioners. That infatuation with combat had been passed on to him by his legendary trainer/mentor, Cus D'Amato, who had devised a fighting system that Tyson was born to execute. At 14 years of age, the future undisputed heavyweight champion was already 190 pounds and armed with devastating weaponry. The blazing hand speed and ability to bridge the gap in the blink of an eye belied his large, stocky and powerful frame, which looked like it was designed for the sole purpose of causing destruction.

During the early years, Tyson was a hardcore addict and learning to relieve opponents of their senses was a Class-A drug. D'Amato was the distinguished professor and Tyson was the willing student who never missed a class. You don't become that good at anything without putting the work in. He couldn't absorb knowledge fast enough, and that vast library of fight films, shared by Tyson's future managers, Jim Jacobs and Bill Cayton, was a godsend.

"I'd watch fight films all day and all night," recalled Tyson fondly in a recent interview with The Ring. "I'd get up in the morning, watch a couple of films, go running, get in the shower, go to school, come home, eat, do my chores and go upstairs and watch boxing until it was time to go to the gym.

"I watched the greatest fighters that ever lived, and I was so lucky that it actually wasn't fair to other fighters. I molded myself and taught myself how to be just like those guys. I learned how they moved in the ring. I learned how they acted on the street. I learned how they ate their food. I learned how they interacted with their families. I just knew their lives."

Tyson (50-6, 44 KOs) was a professional between 1985 and 2005 and won everything there was to win. With the exception of Muhammad Ali, his name was more synonymous with boxing than any other. Like Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano and Ali before him, he transcended the sport and his era was unforgettable. But as much as Tyson learned from his glamour division forebears, he was also a huge fan of the smaller men.

"I watched Sugar Ray Robinson fights, and I watched (the Robinson documentary) Pound for Pound over and over," said Tyson, who would eventually meet the legendary five-time middleweight champ at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. "Nobody was as exciting as Robinson. I would watch Ray Robinson fight, he would do things, and I'd be like, 'Oh, Damn!'

"Henry Armstrong! Wow! Henry Armstrong was nonstop. This guy held world titles in three weights simultaneously: featherweight, lightweight and welterweight. From 126 to 147 pounds? All at once? Holy moly! I don't get to watch these guys as much now, but if there's a special (dedicated boxing documentary), then I'll watch that, or I might have a look on my phone and watch some of the great old fighters."

The knowledge that Tyson obtained as a teenager and in his subsequent years as a contender and champion is so vast that there's sure to be a book opportunity there, perhaps one spanning several volumes. If you're a fan of the sweet science, you could listen to the heavyweight Hall of Famer discuss great fighters for hours and never get bored for a moment. Here's just a taste of Mike Tyson's thoughts and opinions on 10 of his legendary predecessors. »

JACK JOHNSON

TITLE REIGN: 1908 - 1915 • **RECORD:** 54-11-7 (34 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"I loved Jack Johnson; he was amazing. You have to remember that he was born 15-16 years after slavery. How do you go from being a young kid in Texas at that time to becoming what he became? I admired him because he really stood his ground. Black people were being killed for looking at white women during that time, and he married three of them. He was different from Ali, years ahead of time, and he was a little more extreme than Ali."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"He was riding in a car and a cop came over on a bike and gave him a ticket. This was around 1908, and the cop charged him $50. Do you know how much that was back then? Probably $1,000, right? Jack Johnson gave him $100 and said, 'Keep the change, because I'll be coming back the same way!'"

JACK DEMPSEY

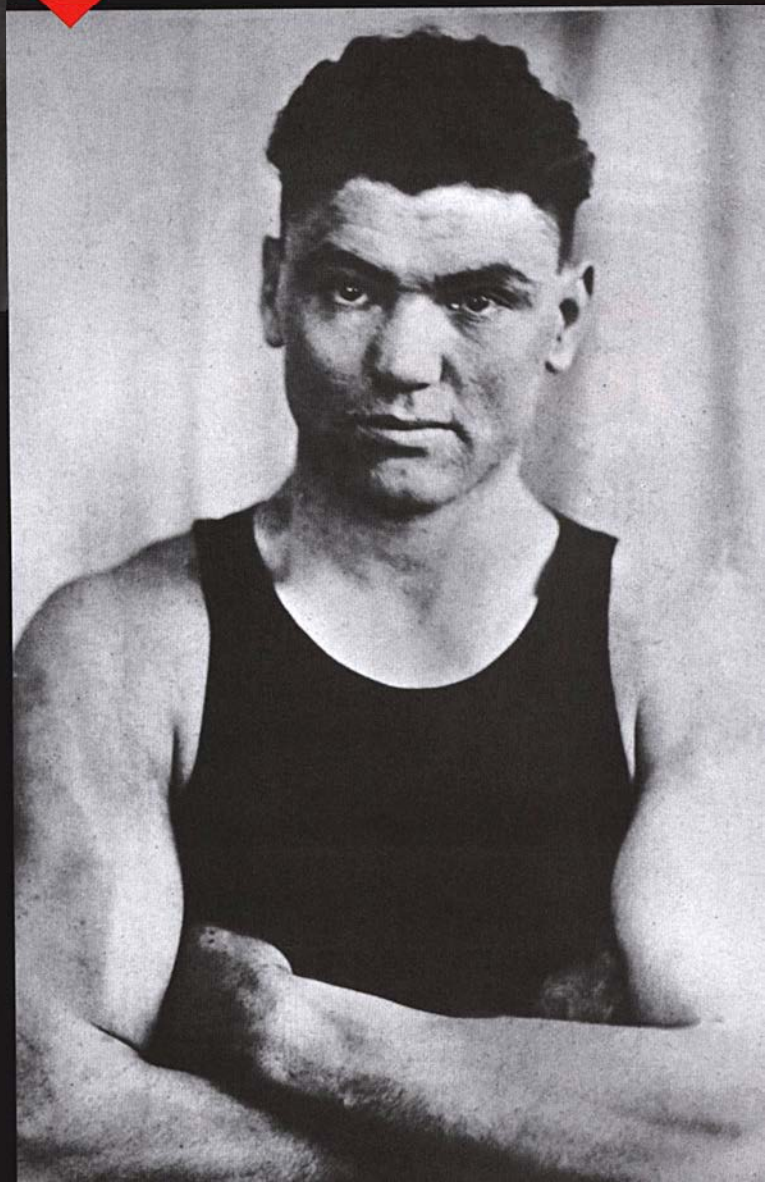
TITLE REIGN: 1919 - 1926 • **RECORD:** 54-6-8 (44 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"I loved Dempsey because he was exciting; he was very ferocious; he had that animal-like persona. I thought that was awesome, and I wanted to be just like that. He had that killer's mentality, but he was embraced by the people during his time; he was loved. He started out like a hobo, and by the Roaring Twenties he'd become the first million-dollar fighter." (The revenue from Dempsey's title defense against Georges Carpentier totaled $1,789,238, the first time the one-million dollar mark was breached.)

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"It's got to be Jess Willard. He broke his ribs, his cheekbone, his eye socket. Those guys were animals back then."



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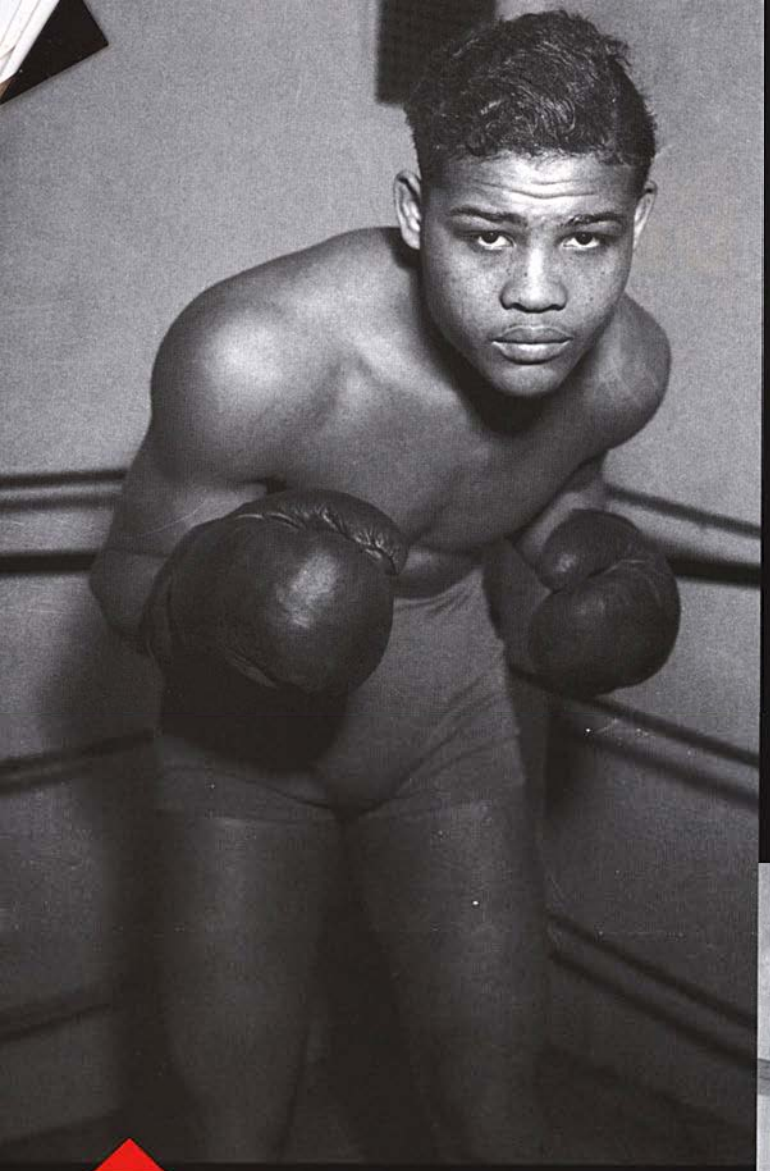


JOE LOUIS

TITLE REIGN: 1937 – 1949 • **RECORD:** 66-3 (52 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"Joe Louis was the first heavyweight to put combinations together with pinpoint accuracy. He would hit you, knock you out and hit you another three or four times before you hit the floor. The possibility of getting up from that kind of knockout is almost zero. He never celebrated a win; he just kicked your ass and walked back to the corner like nothing had even happened."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"It's between Billy Conn (fight one) and Jersey Joe Walcott (fight two). He was behind in both fights and knocked them cold. If Joe Louis ever sees that you're hurt, he'll throw everything at you. You saw the combination he [finished] Walcott with … God damn!"

ROCKY MARCIANO

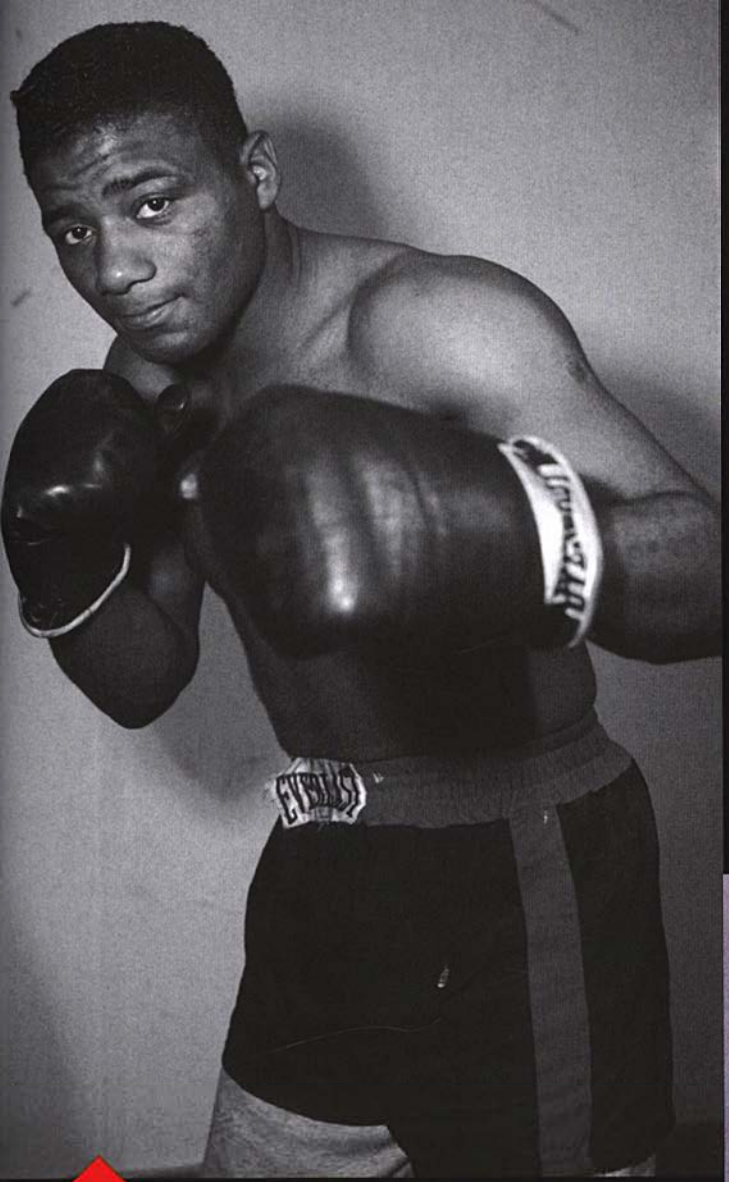
TITLE REIGN: 1952 – 1956 • **RECORD:** 49-0 (43 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"His determination and his willpower made him special. He would just beat you to death in there. Marciano was an animal, and he would do anything it took to win a fight."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"My favorite moment was the knockout of Jersey Joe Walcott (in fight one). That was a beautiful right hand. Marciano had been down in the first round, he was behind on points, and he came back in Round 13 and knocked him cold. That's the way you want to win a championship."



SONNY LISTON

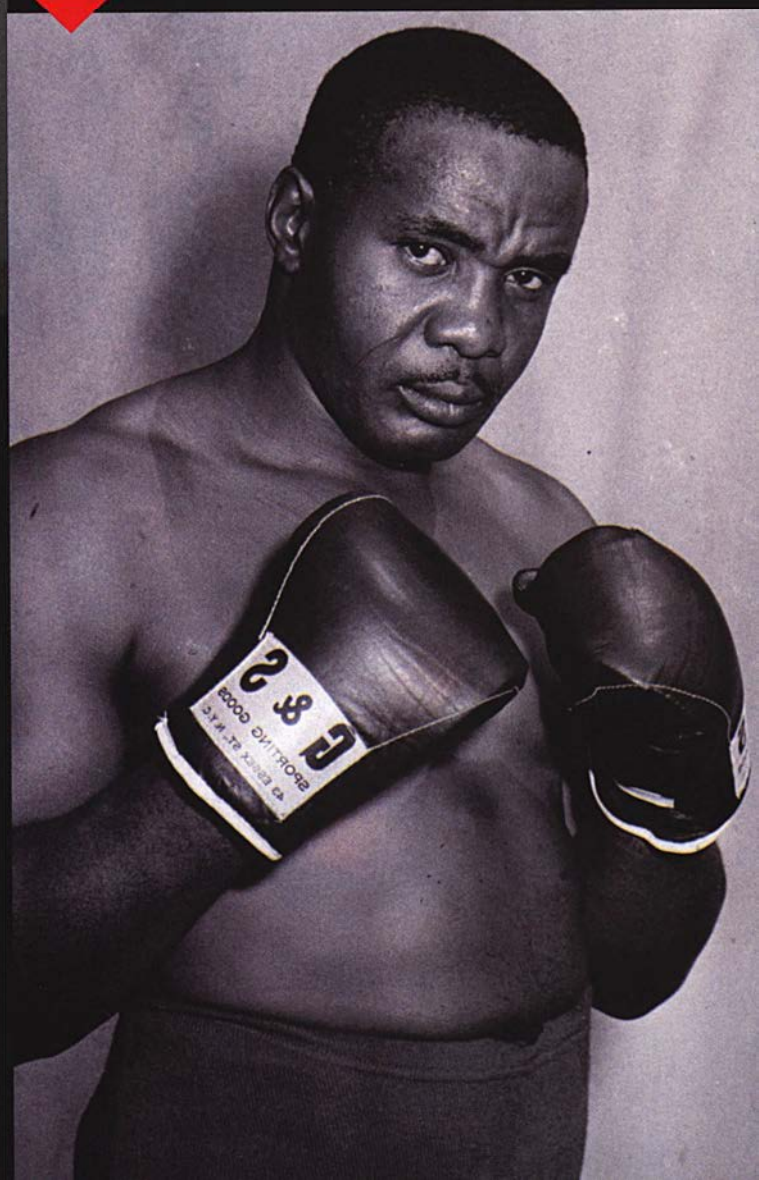
TITLE REIGN: 1962 - 1964 • **RECORD:** 50-4 (39 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"He was as mean as they come and as tough as they come. Apparently, Ali talked smack to him one time and Liston slapped him right across the face. Look at the guys Liston fought before winning the title. Cleveland Williams twice? God damn! Zora Folley? And he was killing these guys, too. He got his jaw broken (against Marty Marshall) once, lost (an eight-round decision) and came back to fight the guy again (Liston won the Marshall rematch by 10-round unanimous decision a year later)."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"All of them; all of his fights were great. Cleveland Williams shook him up and he still came back to knock him out."



FLOYD PATTERSON

TITLE REIGN: 1956 - 1959, 1960 - 1962
RECORD: 55-8-1 (40 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"He doesn't get the credit he deserves, and a lot of that comes down to his personality. He was very introverted, he didn't talk very much, and the people didn't understand him or relate to him the same way they did other champions. He was just a very nice person. As a fighter, he was fast and punched very hard for his size."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"The second (Ingemar) Johansson fight, when he knocked him out cold (with a single left hook). That was a really good punch."

LOUIS, MARCIANO, PATTERSON: BETTMANN

MUHAMMAD ALI

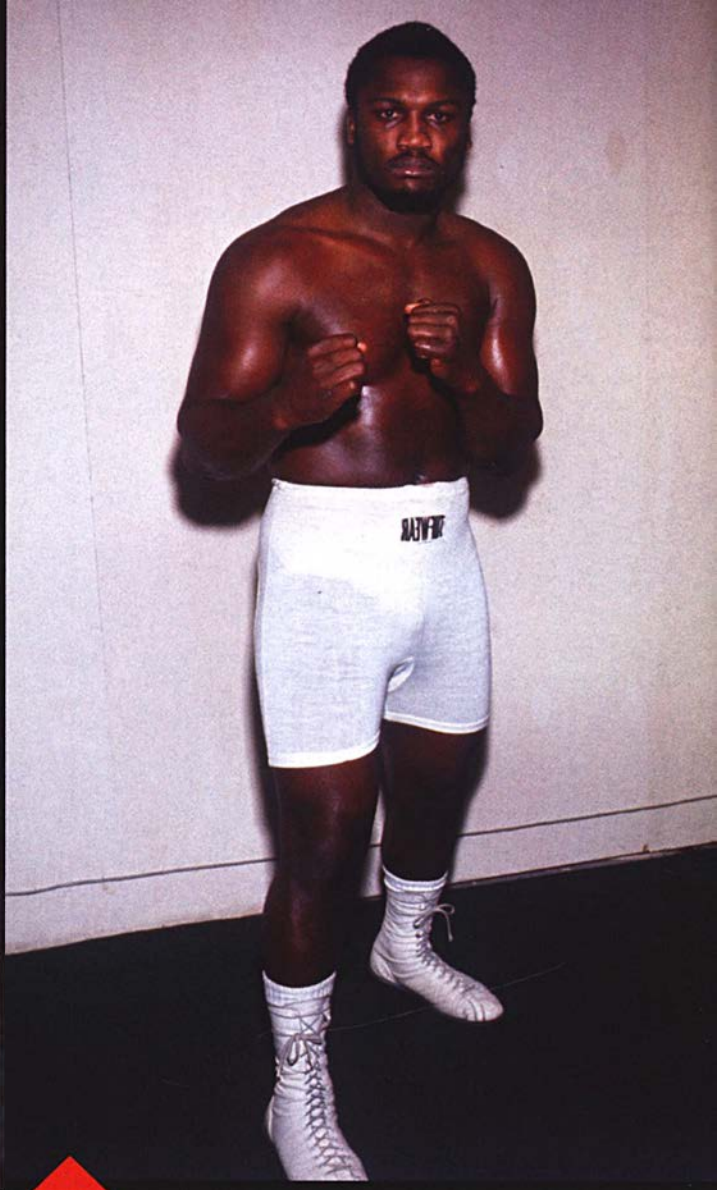
TITLE REIGN: 1964 - 1967, 1974 - 1978, 1978 - 1979
RECORD: 56-5 (37 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"Ali, of course, was a hero of mine. His confidence and his belief in himself made him very special. Ali did everything wrong as a fighter – kept his hands down; he never threw a body punch in his career; he pulled his head back. All of that worked for him, but if anyone else tried it, they'd get killed. He would also fight you until he died; he would never give up."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"The first Sonny Liston fight, the first Joe Frazier fight and the third Joe Frazier fight. He was at his very best against Cleveland Williams."



JOE FRAZIER

TITLE REIGN: 1970 - 1973 • **RECORD:** 32-4-1 (27 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"Like Marciano, it was his determination and his will to win. But he was more ferocious than Marciano and he was just a hard man. He had that same desperation to win at all costs. At the end of the third Ali fight, Joe Frazier couldn't see and said to his trainer, 'Tell me where he is, I'll get him!'"

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"For Joe Frazier it's got to be the first Ali fight. The first fight is one of my favorite fights ever, but the third one is the best because they fought to the death. They fought until they couldn't fight anymore, and you can't beat that."

GEORGE FOREMAN

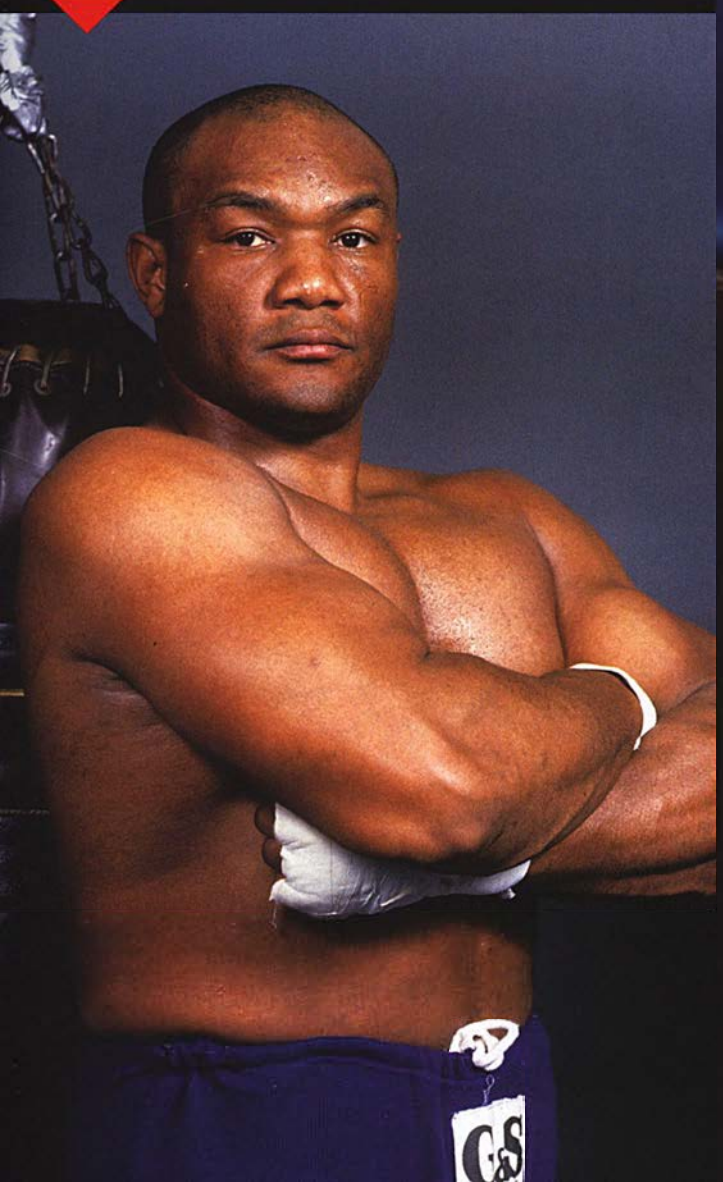
TITLE REIGN: 1973 - 1974, 1994 - 1995
RECORD: 76-5 (68 KOs)

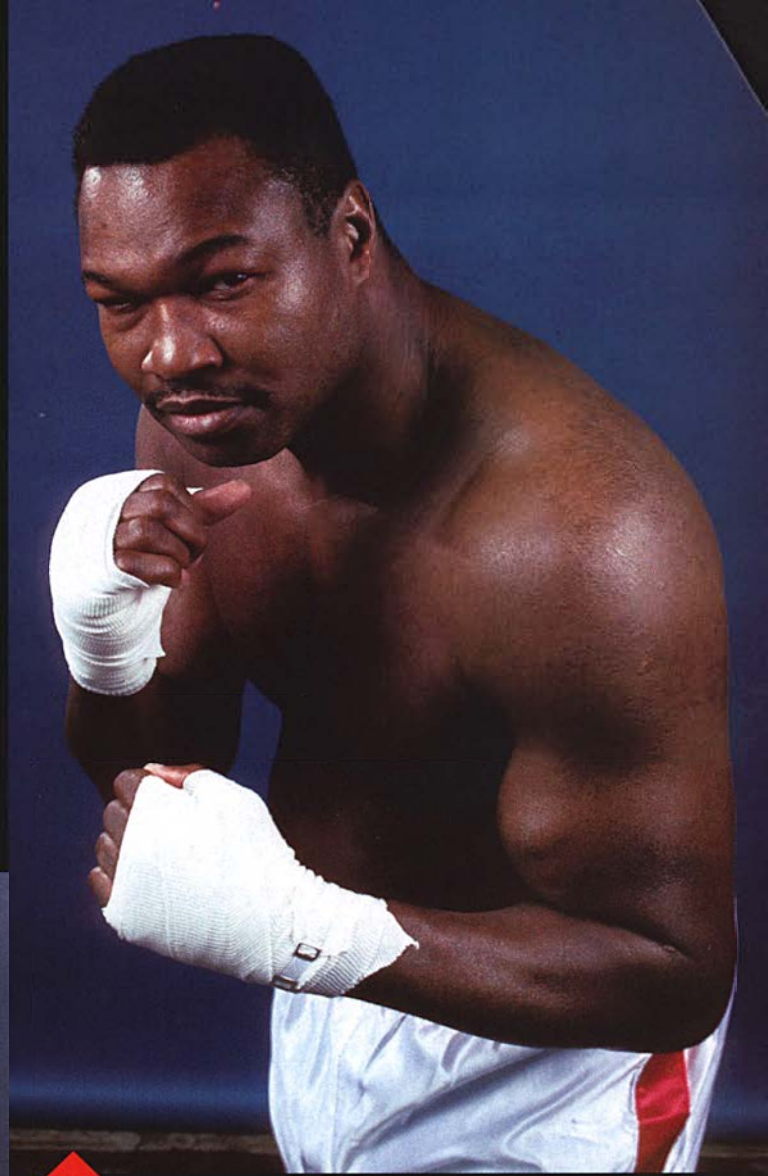
WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"He had a lot of guts, he was mean in the ring and he threw hard punches. He always said that Sonny Liston was his idol, and you only have to watch George Foreman fight and you can see the resemblance. He was thought to be invincible at one time."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"Joe Frazier (fight one) was the best moment for George Foreman. It's not easy to watch Joe Frazier get beat up that easily, but styles make fights and that's part of the game, baby. Joe Frazier had more than met his match with George Foreman."





LARRY HOLMES

TITLE REIGN: 1978 - 1985 • **RECORD:** 69-6 (44 KOs)

WHAT MADE HIM SPECIAL?

"He was in Ali's shadow and wanted to prove that he was his own man. He fought some great fights in his prime and got off the canvas to win. Eventually he got the respect, and he deserved that 100 percent. Just look how special he was after his prime. He went the distance with Holyfield, he beat Ray Mercer and I think he was a point away from beating Oliver McCall. If Holmes had taken a couple of fights before he fought me, there's no way I'd have knocked him out in the fourth round."

FAVORITE MOMENT?

"I liked the fights with Renaldo Snipes, Earnie Shavers and Mike Weaver. He had a lot of great fights."

Tom Gray is Executive Editor for The Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

THE NAMES BEHIND THE KNOCKOUTS

TYSON'S RISE TO FAME WAS BUILT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TERROR OF HIS KNOCKOUT POWER, BUT THOSE WHO FACED HIM SAW A MORE COMPLEX FIGHTER

By **Tris Dixon**

In just 215 extraordinary rounds, Mike Tyson left an indelible mark on boxing. His lightning-fast rise, violent pomp and controversial decline summed up the best and worst of the sport and will never be forgotten. Whether you pick the highs, choose the lows, remember Tyson the shooting star burning at his brightest or the Tyson who loitered in the darkness, he remains iconic more than three decades after he captured the WBC title with a two-round mauling of Trevor Berbick.

Was Tyson a prodigy who squandered his talent and fell short of absolute greatness, or did his belligerent best make him a surefire legend?

For many, it wasn't who he beat but how he beat them or, more to the point, how he annihilated them. His signature win was a 91-second demolition of Michael Spinks, and it really didn't get much better than that.

Then came a long, painful fall. There were divorces, spells in prison, he declared bankruptcy in 2003, and had a few stints in rehab before a rebirth that saw him become a marijuana mogul and popular for his roles in films such as *The Hangover* and the rebooted *Kickboxer.*

Now the 54-year-old warrior can rest and allow others to squabble over his legacy, but those who faced him won't forget what he's done.

Trent Singleton, from Chicago, was the second man to fight Mike as a pro. He's now an Uber driver and boxed Tyson before they knew who and what Tyson was, before the fear factor became a thing. In fact, Trent helped create the fear factor as one of the highlight-reel losses. On April 10, 1985, at the Empire State Plaza Convention Center in Albany, he lasted just 52 seconds.

"When I got down to New York, I had about three days' notice. I knew nothing of Tyson other than he'd fought in the Olympic box-offs and lost to Henry Tillman," Singleton recalled. "At the weigh-in, he was 214 pounds and I was 198. I knew I had to move, and as an amateur I used the ring. But when it came to the fight, the ring

JOHN BUCKLE – EMPICS

Lou Savarese is sent sprawling after being clipped by the first power punch (a lunging left hook) Mike Tyson landed during their wild 38-second encounter in Scotland.

was so goddamn little I couldn't run. I couldn't move, and I freaked out. He knocked me down three times. I got up each time and I feel I could have done a lot better. I had to fight his fight and slug. I'm not a slugger. I move and jab, and I'm fast. When I saw I couldn't do that, I had no fight for him and I had to do what he wanted to do."

Tyson swarmed through Singleton, who never fought again. Trainer Kevin Rooney was in Mike's corner and then fought in the main event.

Things would continue that way for Tyson as he notched a string of early knockouts. With Rooney in camp carrying out training duties for Cus D'Amato, and Bill Cayton and Jim Jacobs running the management and marketing side, Tyson cut an impressive swath through those lined up to face him, sometimes boxing two or three times a month.

He was always expected to win, but even those brought in to give him rounds couldn't last.

In February 1986, a few months after D'Amato had passed away, Tyson fought Jesse Ferguson in Troy, New York. It resulted in another dramatic victory.

"Tyson was unstoppable when we fought," remembered Ferguson, who was beaten in the sixth. "He caught me with a great shot. He hit me with an uppercut that made my eyes water. I held on until I heard the bell, but after that my corner couldn't stop my nose from bleeding. It was a big distraction. I had to keep on holding until the referee said enough was enough. Tyson was strong and fast, but everything was in his favor as we were in his hometown. Don't believe what you hear about him. He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met in the game. I sparred with him for 11 of his title fights."

Astonishingly, from that Ferguson fight in February to the night he beat Berbick in November, Tyson fought another nine times, including 10-rounders against James Tillis and Mitch Green.

Many said opponents were beaten before the first bell.

One who disagreed was Larry Holmes. The veteran former champion was 38 and making a comeback after retiring.

"When I fought Mike Tyson, I was off for two years, I hadn't been in shape to fight him and they gave me two months to get ready," he said. "Mike Tyson's a good puncher, you know; he's down low. I had retired by then. He was good. He was short and he had to get up to get to you. So Mike Tyson was OK, but there was nobody there (in the heavyweight division). There was no Muhammad Ali there, there was no Larry Holmes there, there was no George Foreman there ..."

Was it a regret Larry didn't take a couple of comeback fights before challenging Tyson?

"I should have had a tune-up or warm-up to get started," he admitted. "No excuses; Mike Tyson whupped me fair and square."

Ring rust and Tyson were a bad combination for Larry Holmes.

"HE WAS ALL SPEED. HE HAD BLINDING-FAST SPEED." - PETER MCNEELEY

Holmes went in the fourth round. Then Tony Tubbs, Spinks, Frank Bruno and Carl Williams fell in short order.

A routine defense in February 1990 in Tokyo, where he'd beaten Tubbs, against longshot James "Buster" Douglas was supposed to be a formality. But then one of the greatest sporting upsets of all time happened.

Douglas climbed off the floor to become the first man to beat Tyson.

"I had a lot of things going on in my life," said history's greatest underdog. "I was separated from my wife. A lot of things weren't going correctly or as you'd want them to and I was kind of pissed off, so that motivated me even more to achieve my childhood dream of becoming heavyweight champion of the world. I was a top contender for sure; I was top three or top four. I was legitimate. I didn't take it personally that people wrote me off. They were wrong. I belonged in that position and I deserved that position fighting Mike. It was my chance. It was my second chance. The first time, I fought Tony Tucker and I came up a little short for the IBF title, and that made me even more determined after I blew that opportunity. So when I came back a second time, I was going to be more focused and even more determined.

"I was confident. I was hitting him with the jab, touching him with the right hand, and in the eighth round I had his back up against the wall and I knew it was going to be my night. He had caught me with that shot (to score a knockdown in the same round), and at that moment in the middle of the fight, he let me know he was still alive and I still had to concentrate on my job."

The Ohio man did just that, and in the 10th, a volley of shots dropped Tyson, causing him to fumble for his mouthpiece. Then Douglas knew it was over.

"If he had been coherent, he'd have got up, because the referee would have got the mouthpiece and they would have had to clean it off. But he wasn't coherent enough to realize that," Douglas said. "I knew he was hurt bad when he was stumbling after that mouthpiece."

The cloak of invincibility had gone. Tyson was human after all. Worse than that, Don King tried to get Tyson reinstated as the champion, claiming Douglas had survived a long count when he was knocked down. It wasn't a good look for Tyson.

"That was hogwash," said Douglas. "He went from the 'Baddest Man on the Planet' to a baby whining about it."

Tyson rebounded with four wins, two over Razor Ruddock, but then went to prison for three years in Indiana.

When he returned in 1995, there was a new mystique about him. He was bad again, and the first man to test the waters was New England-area journeyman Peter McNeeley.

Was it different facing Tyson than anyone else?

"Obviously," said "The Hurricane." "The pre-fight alone was different. We signed the contract about three months before the fight, maybe more than that, and that was probably because he'd just gotten out of lockup so he had to get into boxing condition. You know you're facing one of the greats of all time. I did what I said I was going to do and I went right at him. Mike knows his way around boxing, that's for sure. ... He had a lot of experience. So when I did what I did, I was off-balance with the first knockdown and he caught me with a really good straight right, but I was right up ... Mills Lane hadn't even started a count yet. Then I went right at him again, and at the end he caught me with his best punch, the uppercut, and I went down. Only the real trained eye that knows the game would have seen him switch southpaw as he threw the uppercut. He was all speed. He had blinding-fast speed. It surprised me how fast. Hell yes. I don't care what fighter you are – any fighter over 200 pounds can punch, but with him the power and that speed? Deadly combination."

The old aura re-emerged with quick wins over Buster Mathis, Bruno (for the WBC title) and Bruce Seldon (WBA). The fear factor was supposedly returning to the point that many worried about Evander Holyfield's health when he was lined up to face Tyson. Evander knew different. He'd known Tyson for more than 10 years.

"We were amateurs together; we were both on the losing squad trying to make the Olympic team, so we'd spent a lot of time together," recalled "The Real Deal." "He was a good fighter, a very talented fighter, and he had some skills that other people didn't have. I was a good boxer and he was a good puncher, and he was very technical with a lot of things. And everybody has their things they do well and things they don't do too well, but I was kind of in the middle of everything; I had decent hand speed, I had decent power and a strategy. I tried to use my reach

and I tried to be first, and I tried to move when it was time to move. I hit him with some good shots at the end. He never did go down, and I hit him with a lot of shots that had put a lot of people down. He showed that he did have the heart, and I hurt him a lot. And the referee stopped the fight."

It was all over in Round 11. Holyfield had dared to be great.

He did it again, too, but in their 1997 rematch, Tyson unraveled and bit him.

"It's obvious he was frustrated because he knew things weren't going his way. He knew I was always in great shape and I was going to fight my fight continuously," Holyfield said. "I was the type of person who liked to put pressure on people, and sometimes they make mistakes."

Tyson's "mistake" cost him a huge fine and a lengthy ban.

He returned after 18 months to defeat Frans Botha, did a short stint in jail for assault and then went one round with Orlin Norris – a fight that was later changed to a no-contest due to Norris injuring his knee. Tyson then took his show to Europe.

There he faced Julius Francis, who was in top form but wholly aware it was an opportunity to make money: He sold advertising space on the soles of his boxing boots.

"I had a good year in 1999; I'd beaten Pele Reid, Danny Williams and Scott Welch," Francis reflected. "I never called for the Tyson fight, but later in that year news came out that Tyson might be making a European tour and mine was one of the names that was mentioned. Far be it from me to consider myself even as a potential opponent for Mike Tyson, but when it did come round, I never hesitated. It was a case of 'Wow, I'm getting this opportunity to face one of the greatest fighters in the last 150 years of boxing.' Who wouldn't jump at that chance?"

Francis said the fear factor was no greater for Tyson than anyone else. He'd known hardship and struggle even before that night in Manchester in January 2000.

"Tyson has two arms and two legs the same as anybody else, and he feels pain the same as anybody else. What Tyson was very good at was internalizing that intimidation and that fear and then pushing it out onto people. With me, I'd already been stabbed. I'd been shot at. I'd already nearly lost my life, and this wasn't a case of me going to be intimidated by this guy. The only difference with him was he had such great knowledge and skill in the boxing game; he'd had a good mentor in Cus D'Amato. And the other thing was he had natural punching power – in both hands. I wasn't scared of Tyson; the thing was he was that good a fighter at that time. The Tyson I fought would have beaten Lennox at that time – he was that good. (Lewis) fought Tyson two years after me and he was basically washed up, and when Danny (Williams) fought him four years later, he was a shell of that."

Francis was stopped in Round 2 and Tyson was back in Britain to take on big Lou Savarese a few months later.

"As a fighter, you think you can beat anybody with the right game plan. But with Tyson ... anything that he's around he just magnifies," confessed Savarese. "He demands so much attention. He's such an amazing fighter and exciting. When you hear you're fighting Tyson, the whole hype behind it, the mystique about him ... I fought Foreman, I fought Holyfield, but when you fight Tyson, it's so different with the magnitude and how much attention it gets. I always thought I could win in my head – it doesn't mean I can. I thought if I could get him in the later rounds ... sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. The thing about him that's amazing is there are guys that are strong and guys that are fast ... he's strong and fast; it's so deceiving how quick he is. That's what makes him so different. Most fighters aren't that quick, and you don't realize how quick he is until you get in there with him. He caught me on the temple. I went down, I got up pretty quickly. A few times in my career I was down, against Lance Whitaker and a couple of other guys. I got back up, and to this day I thought the reason they were stopping the (Tyson) fight was because of the referee (Tyson hit John Coyle as he moved in to finish Savarese). Listen, he's such a great finisher, and maybe it was a blessing for me, but I always liked to try and finish the fight if I can."

In Tyson's autobiography, Undisputed Truth, he admitted to getting high on cocaine the day before he fought Savarese.

A couple of fights later, Tyson was emphatically flattened by Lennox Lewis in a contest that would have been more relevant for both legacies a decade earlier, and by then Tyson's zest for the sport, that early love and passion, had been replaced by the need for a paycheck. After stopping Clifford Etienne in 49 seconds, Tyson

"THE TYSON I FOUGHT WOULD HAVE BEATEN LENNOX (LEWIS)."
- JULIUS FRANCIS

Julius Francis was impressed with Tyson's knowledge and skill during their brief fight in Manchester, England.

lost to both Brit Danny Williams and big Irishman Kevin McBride inside the distance.

Williams was a huge underdog, but that brought the best out of him.

"I totally believed in myself 100 percent – no fear whatsoever," declared Williams. "Nobody believed I could win, and I perform at my best when nobody believes in me and there's no pressure on me.

"The first thing that shocked me was his punching power. He was so fast as well; it was scary. When he first hit me ... it was a weird feeling. It was easily the hardest I've ever been punched. I was expecting it, but it still came as a shock. I maintained my confidence and said to myself, 'Just ride the storm and come back later.'"

In Round 4, Williams cut loose with a succession of punches and Tyson, who'd suffered a torn ligament in his knee during the first round, dropped into the ropes, a beaten man.

"I can't explain it," said Williams when he was asked what it felt like seeing Tyson on the canvas. "When I threw those shots and knocked him down, I prayed to God, 'Please don't let this guy get up. Please don't let him get up.' And when he didn't get up, I was so happy. It was an unbelievable feeling. I was just elated."

The McBride fight confirmed the news that Tyson romantics hoped was not true, that the story was over. There was nothing left.

There'd been 50 wins and 6 losses. His 20-year career was confined to the record books.

"Most definitely he was one of the all-time great heavyweights. Hands down," said Douglas. "He came in, wrecked everything and injected new life into the heavyweight division."

Savarese, who'd lasted 38 seconds with Tyson in Glasgow, said: "I'm such a boxing historian, I have a lot of respect for him, but doing drugs before a fight? Old-timers didn't do that. So I have trouble saying he's the greatest. He's a top 10 heavyweight. He could have been the greatest, he just had so many sidebars with getting into trouble and things like that, but he could have been the greatest ever. Guys like (Muhammad) Ali, (Rocky) Marciano, Joe Louis, they fought everybody. He's a different beast and maybe they wouldn't have dealt with somebody his size – he wasn't that tall but was so compact and strong."

Maybe Mike didn't achieve what he could have. Maybe he overachieved, given his life could have been over before it started as a troubled youth in Brooklyn. Regardless of where historians or fans rank him, his peers respect him.

"He's definitely one of the greatest, because the fact is when boxing was dying, Mike Tyson was the one who lifted boxing up," concluded Holyfield. "It went to a whole other level when he became the heavyweight champion of the world, and nobody can forget that. He was on that front cover so much – every time you looked at anything, he was on the front cover. People came to like what they were getting when they had him as the heavyweight champion of the world. He was ideal for (bringing in new) fans, because they loved Mike Tyson." RING

THE REINVENTION

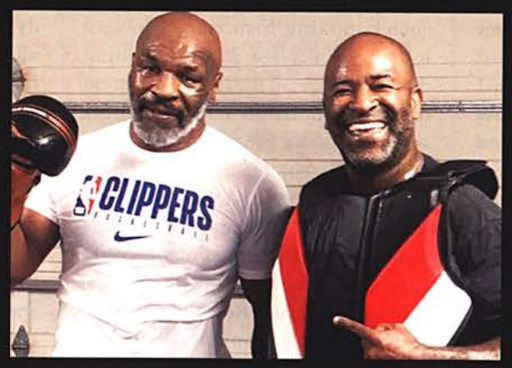
FROM CANNABIS ADVOCACY TO SHOWBIZ, MIKE TYSON HAS MATURED, MELLOWED AND THRIVED IN HIS POST-BOXING LIFE – AND THE PUBLIC IS AS HOOKED AS EVER

By **Don Stradley**

Tribal face tattoo. Crunching uppercuts. A bit of head movement, remarkably quick hands. Yes, it was Mike Tyson, looking sharp on Instagram after being gone from the ring for 15 years. Though he hinted he was getting in shape for some charity exhibitions, the story snowballed into rumors of a full-fledged comeback. When Tyson was eventually seen horsing around with some professional wrestlers on TNT, a groan was heard across the land. Had we been played? Still, the sight of Tyson working the pads again had a delirious effect on the less-than-rational social media gang, something akin to film scholars learning that Akira Kurosawa was not only still alive, but working on an alternate cut of *Seven Samurai*. Whatever one thought of the 53-year-old Tyson's alleged mission – whether he would, as some believed, mount an assault on the heavyweight class, or end up getting hurt – the general reaction was a triumph for Tyson, the final proof of his reinvention.

The amending of the Tyson image has been an ongoing effort in the past decade. His transformation from prizefighting psychopath to white-bearded cannabis tycoon was inspiring to observe. After all, he'd lived a tabloid-ready life and at one time seemed destined for a tabloid-ready death. But Tyson's new mellow persona – the vegan capitalist blissed out on weed – was at odds with his legacy as a tough guy. A recent episode of his merry podcast, *Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson*, saw him turn emotional as he recalled his violent heyday. He was tired, he said, of feeling like "a bitch." Under the pot haze, the old tiger still prowled.

Though details of his comeback remained murky, it didn't appear to be driven by money. In the 2010s, Tyson worked constantly, rebuilding himself as a sort of roving raconteur, an idea possibly inspired by his candid turn in James Toback's 2008 documentary. That movie, which bore only Tyson's last name as its title, wowed the film festival circuit and proved the Tyson saga had legs. Since then, whether promoting his ghostwritten autobiographies or working himself into a lather during his one-man stage show (later presented as an HBO special), Tyson developed a storyteller's gift for turning his past into shtick. One moment he's recalling the time he nearly beat up Brad



A rejuvenated Tyson continues to captivate the public with his one-man stage shows and frenetic mitt workouts, which have recently gone viral.

Pitt, then he's telling about offering a zookeeper $100,000 because he wanted to fight a silverback gorilla. Talking keeps Tyson flush.

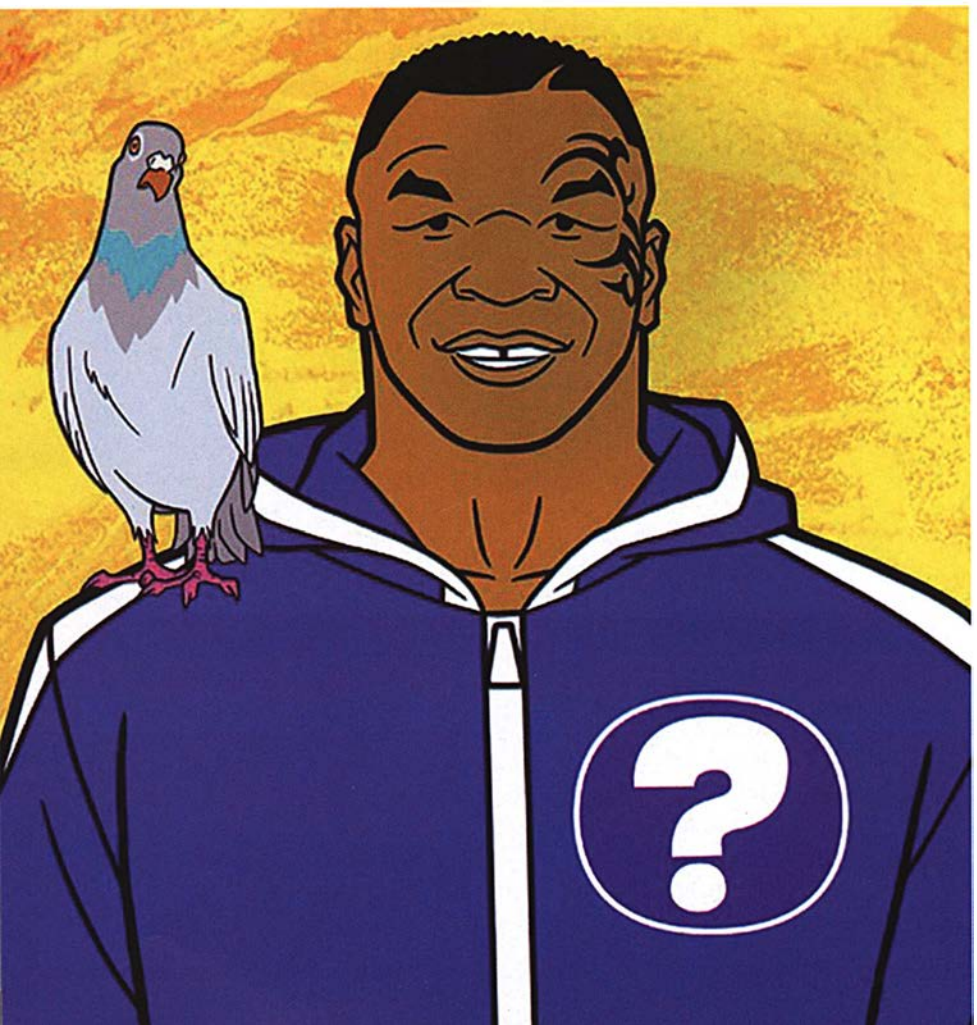
As if to counterbalance the harrowing tone of his more serious work, Tyson has also shown a comical side in movies, commercials and television programs. Perhaps the most intriguing development in this regard is *Mike Tyson Mysteries*, an animated series where Tyson and some pals investigate crimes, a la *Scooby-Doo*. As of 2020, there have been 70 episodes of the Tyson cartoon; to put this in perspective, there were only 68 episodes of *The Huckleberry Hound Show* and a meager 16 of *Josie and the Pussycats*. Strange as it is to see Tyson as part of Cartoon Network's nighttime lineup, it's another example of the creative and versatile way he's thrived in retirement. There's little he won't do. He once appeared on Italian television to playfully spar with a young girl, and even inhaled helium on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, changing his voice into a Gollum-like croak.

Of course, part of Tyson's charm is that he's still a bit of a rube. During a New York Public Library event, for instance, he was asked why so much of his first autobiography was printed in italics. "I don't know," Tyson said. "What are italics?" On his podcast, where guests range from Mickey Rourke to Eminem, Tyson is occasionally so baked that he appears sleepy. Sometimes the conversation veers clumsily into something like group therapy; when Ray Leonard was his guest, the two kept weeping over incidents from their turbulent pasts. Tyson's co-host, former NFL player Eben Britton, often provides positive reinforcement with lines like, "You're such a good man, Mike."

Something must be working. Five and a half million Twitter followers couldn't be wrong.

Tyson's post-career appeal is due to a knot of factors. First, the untamed party monster who has survived to tell the tale satisfies the gawker in all of us. Second, our fetish for youth, and the belief that the youngest heavyweight champion in history was somehow more special than someone with a longer apprenticeship. Third, our obsession with bad boys – our forgiving nature is hopelessly intertwined with our innate ability to recall criminal behavior as merely rebellious, where even a sex fiend and serial ass-grabber is remembered as just a rascal. Fourth, nostalgia for the 1980s, a tumultuous and scary decade that seems rather fun in retrospect. Fifth, a generation brought up in the era of political correctness and an unsteady economy sees Tyson the way our great-grandparents saw figures of the Old West: as a symbol of freedom and reckless bravado. Sixth, a fascination with vulgarians; give $300 million to an uneducated street kid and see what happens. And seventh, the audience's nervous appetite for public meltdowns: Charlie Sheen, Lindsay Lohan, Tyson. All of these strands created a silky veneer around a fellow with a deplorable history.

It's not all down to Tyson being a reformed carnival act. His life has the effect of a heroic fairy tale, one where a boy is plucked from obscurity by a wise old sensei named Cus D'Amato and trained to become a warrior, only to fall prey to wicked women and ruthless businessmen. It was a fizzy mix of Joseph Campbell and Jerry Springer, with a Public Enemy soundtrack. There was a prison sentence he insists was unjust, drug abuse, financial ruin and the personal tragedy of his 4-year-old daughter, Exodus, dying in a household accident. Tyson's ability to withstand calamities and dig his way out of disasters is no doubt part of the public's fascination with him, and possibly explains why at this year's big boxing event between Tyson Fury and Deontay Wilder, Tyson



Tyson's silly side is showcased on the Mike Tyson Mysteries cartoon.

A gray-bearded Tyson interviews Sugar Ray Leonard on his popular podcast.

received a much heartier ovation when introduced alongside Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis, two of his conquerors.

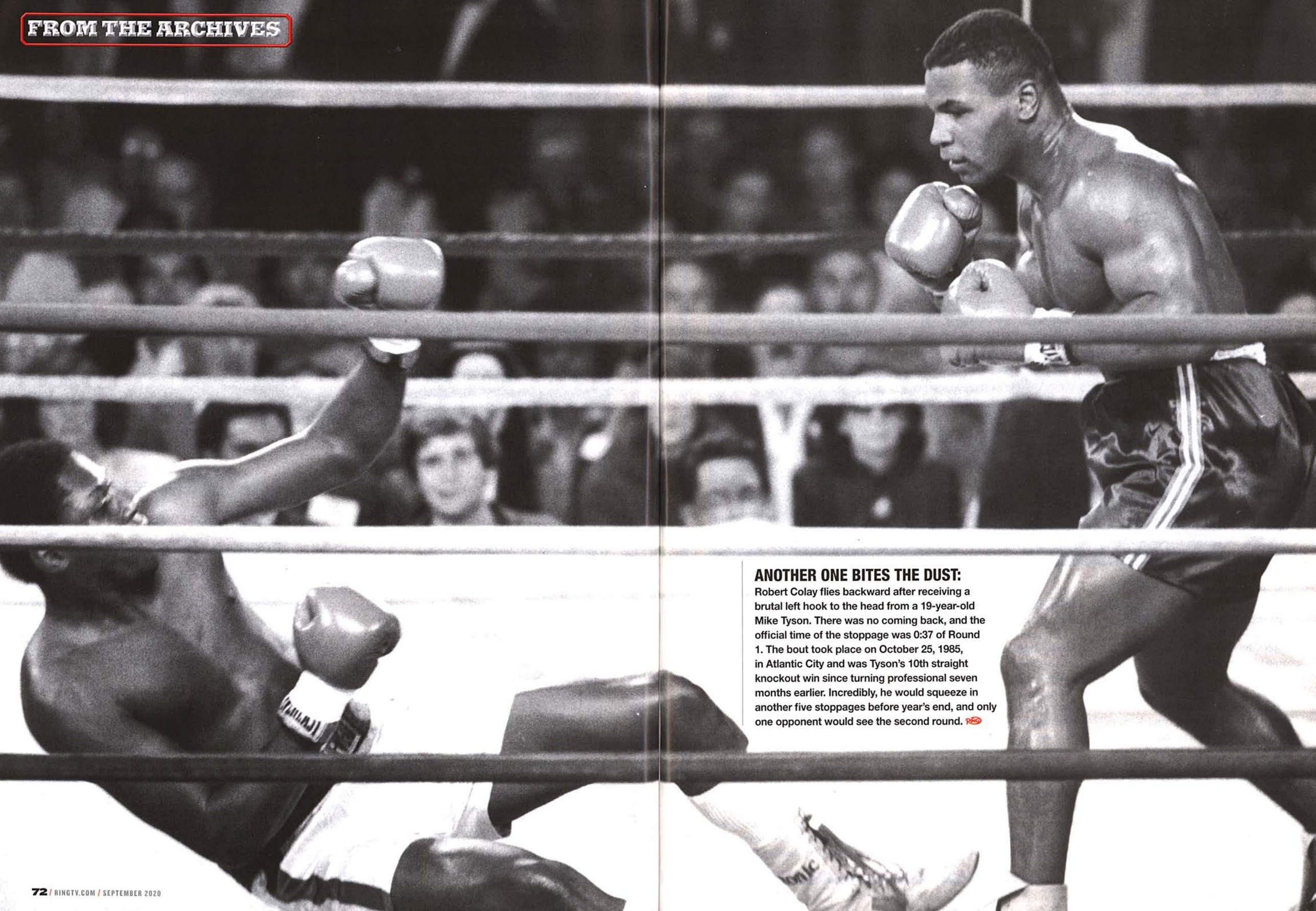
Of course, fighters have remade themselves ever since John L. Sullivan became a temperance speaker. Jack Dempsey became a successful restaurant owner, George Foreman a friendly TV pitchman. Mickey Walker's primitive artwork was displayed in galleries around the country, and Muhammad Ali went from being one of the most controversial men in America to one of the most beloved. But Tyson's relaunch has been alarmingly multi-faceted. We've had comedy Mike, confessional Mike and contrite Mike. We've had Broadway Mike, animated Mike and Mike the gentle stoner.

It is debatable whether these various versions of Tyson were deliberate efforts to change his persona – he's always possessed a conman's knack for shapeshifting – or were simply the natural result of his maturing. When he tweets "being kind to others allows me to be kind to myself," it sounds like a line pulled from a cheesy self-help book. Obviously, portions of his makeover have been carefully orchestrated; he's understood the importance of image and sound bites since the earliest days of his career. Yet he seems comfortable in his current incarnation. As an advocate for love and unity and meditation, he's surprisingly likable. If nothing else, he's a walking advertisement for the calming effects of marijuana.

Of the many comeback scenarios proposed, the one that sounded feasible was an exhibition for charity. Dempsey, one of Tyson's heroes, fought exhibitions around the country to help his bank account during the Great Depression. Dempsey's tour drew crowds and made people happy, as he gave a tired America a taste of the old Jazz Age. Could Tyson do something similar? Could a country gutted by the coronavirus and civil unrest be temporarily buoyed by memories of parachute pants and *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out*!!?

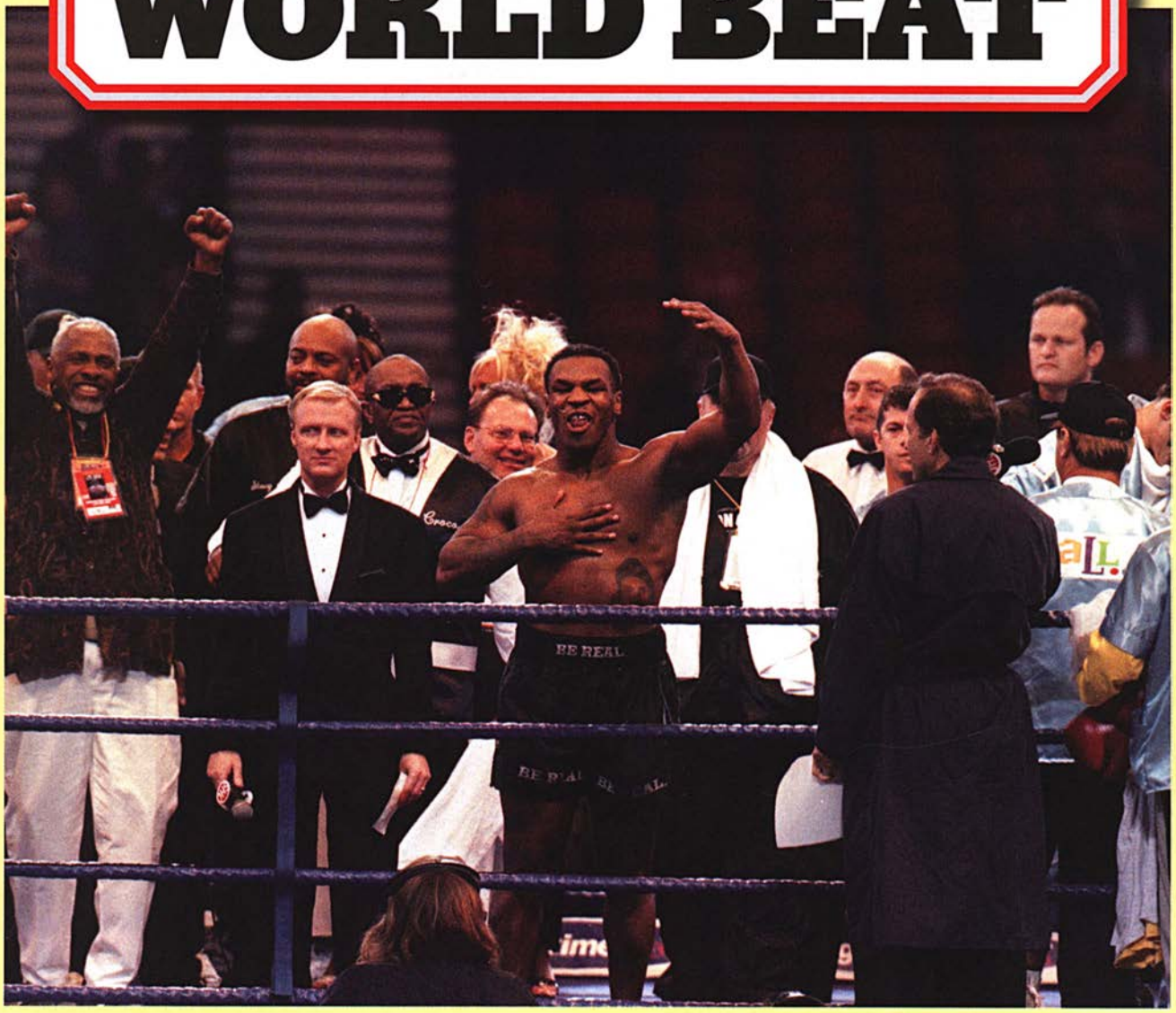
When Tyson boxed an exhibition with Corey "T-Rex" Sanders back in 2006, customers in Youngstown, Ohio, jeered. Not only were they bored at the sight of two overweight men lurching around the ring, but it was too soon after the debacle of his last fight, an embarrassing loss to Kevin McBride. That night ended with Tyson walking back to his dressing room under a rain of beer cups, literally giving fans the finger as he slinked away. It will be interesting to see the reaction this time around, should he really try the exhibition route.

There was something poignant about the now famous Instagram clip of an aged Tyson practicing a boxing drill. He was like an old showbiz trooper rehearsing a time-step, just in case he gets the call to perform. It also proved that Tyson's grip on the public's psyche never completely loosened. He's no longer living his life out there on the edge, and there are probably badder men walking the planet, but he remains an indelible part of pop culture. He hovers above us like a parade float.



ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST:
Robert Colay flies backward after receiving a brutal left hook to the head from a 19-year-old Mike Tyson. There was no coming back, and the official time of the stoppage was 0:37 of Round 1. The bout took place on October 25, 1985, in Atlantic City and was Tyson's 10th straight knockout win since turning professional seven months earlier. Incredibly, he would squeeze in another five stoppages before year's end, and only one opponent would see the second round.

WORLD BEAT



U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Tyson was embraced by British fans during his trip to England.

Mike Tyson took no prisoners and delivered three rounds of mayhem in Manchester and Glasgow during his U.K. fighting sojourn 20 years ago. Julius Francis and then Lou Savarese were the hapless victims. But oh, what a time Iron Mike had in a country where he had as many admirers as he did detractors.

Paid £7 million for the first fight of his American invasion versus Francis, who was managed by Frank Maloney with the event itself promoted by Frank Warren, Tyson carried an aura in his compact, muscular frame that made him one of the most recognized humans on the planet at the time. And his fans here, almost hysterical about his appearances, were not about to miss out. In fact, Tyson's trip to the U.K. raised the idolatry and infamy surrounding him to new levels on this side of The Pond.

Even before he set foot on British soil, though, Tyson, then 33, had the news media and women's rights groups on his case. There was wall-to-wall coverage of every detail of his time here. I can remember covering it for the front, middle and back of the Telegraph newspaper, as it was huge news.

Tyson, already incarcerated for the rape conviction he has always disputed and back from suspension after feeding on Evander Holyfield's ears in their second fight, was under pressure from protesters against his being allowed entry into England when the fight was first announced. At the time, then-Home Office Secretary Jack Straw, of the Labour Government, eventually ruled on the matter, though even Prime Minister Tony Blair himself came under heavy fire for his decision to allow the fighter special dispensation to enter.

MARK THOMPSON

It would have been unjust to stop Tyson, but it added to the hullabaloo on his arrival. Crowds flocked to see him. He had that bristling energy for violence, still – it was in his eyes and his demeanor – but he was also deeply disarmed by the love and adoration of British fans and their knowledge of the sport.

For maximum media exposure – and it was utterly enormous in the end – Tyson's team had decamped on Park Lane, with the most expensive shopping on either side of the hotel entrance to the south and the north. Fast cars, jewelry shops. And just across the six-lane highway, he had Hyde Park for his morning and evening runs. In a downstairs area of the chosen hotel, The Grosvenor House Hotel, adjacent to the back entrance leading into swanky Mayfair – where there were fast girls as well as fast cars – the American and his entourage had a security-cordoned workout room with a ring inside it. It was blisteringly hot in there. We were allowed in, from time to time, in small groups to watch him train and observe his entourage.

Tyson made a visit to Brixton, an area of South London, where he was mobbed. Thousands from the traditionally Afro-Caribbean neighborhood turned out to greet their hero. In the end, the crowds grew so large that the local police moved him into the station to protect him. With thousands of fans surrounding the police station, Tyson took to a megaphone from the first floor and addressed his adoring fans from an open window. "I have got to get back to training, so I would appreciate it if you let me break out. Thank you very much, thank you very much. I love you, Brixton," Tyson had said.

Justice for Women, a feminist organization campaigning for victims of domestic violence, who had made an appeal to the courts against the fighter for entry into the country, had irritated Tyson. "They are just a bunch of frustrated women who want to be men," he countered.

From London, it was up to Manchester for the fight with Francis, who had been training with the British Army at their base in Aldershot.

Tyson was faded by 2000, but he shined vs. Julius Francis.

On January 29, at the sold-out MEN Arena in Manchester, Tyson did what Tyson then did against those who could not repel him, claiming victory by second-round TKO, having knocked Francis down five times. Tyson had a bemused look on his face as he gazed out into the VIP seats, where David Beckham and his wife, Victoria, then of the Spice Girls, were sitting among sporting royalty. Plucked from a number of heavyweights who might have been Tyson's opponent, Francis, a British and Commonwealth champion, had earned his 15 minutes of fame – and a big fee of £350,000 for being the fall guy. Francis, holding a 21-7 record, was never perceived as a threat to the former champion. So little so, indeed, that The Mirror newspaper, a national tabloid, struck a sponsorship deal to have the soles of Francis' shoes branded with the paper's logo. The Brit duly obliged.

Warren, indeed, later revealed that Francis had been in awe of Tyson. "I couldn't believe it when Julius went up to him (Tyson) and said, 'Excuse me, Mike, can I have your autograph, please?' This was at the press conference. I mean, I didn't say anything, because this was a big day for Julius. But I could not believe it. He was totally in awe of Tyson, and I knew then that we had absolutely no chance of winning this fight."

Five months later, Tyson returned to the U.K. to fight Lou Savarese at Hampden Park in Glasgow, Scotland, destroying his fellow American in 38 seconds, dropping Savarese with a left hand. But drama was to follow. Savarese regained his feet, and as he was greeted with another flurry of shots, Tyson knocked referee John Coyle over. The play in the U.K. was over. Two emphatic acts. And Tyson finished the flourish with words for Lennox Lewis, telling the BBC: "It will be no match for me when I am ready. I will pretty much destroy him when I am ready. I will rip his heart out and feed it to him." We know what happened two years later. But this was a chapter British fight fans will never forget. The fights may not have delivered, but this was the chance to get up close and personal with the once-Baddest Man on the Planet.

Gareth A Davies is the boxing writer for the London Daily Telegraph.

JOHN GICHIGI

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Tyson's first post-Bite Fight bout was vs. Frans Botha.

When Mike Tyson walked into the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in January 1999, he had a lot of questions hanging over his head, even for him. He was coming off a 19-month layoff following his ban for the infamous "Bite Fight," but that was just the start. How much was left of the unstoppable force that once left a wake of destruction? Was his heart still in it, or was he damaged goods after the Holyfield defeats? Or perhaps the biggest question of them all: Would he be able to get through a fight without some sort of controversy? That last one almost became an issue.

Lost in the hype surrounding the "Baddest Man on the Planet" was the "White Buffalo," Frans Botha. Back in 1995, the South African was heading toward an eventual showdown with the newly freed Tyson after capturing the vacant IBF crown by outhustling Axel Schulz in Germany, but a positive PED test cost him the belt and a career-high payday.

Still, Botha carried a 39-1 ledger into the fight when it finally happened, his only loss being a 12th-round TKO to Michael Moorer after giving the southpaw plenty of trouble in a gutsy stand. He was confident going in against Tyson. "I was 100 percent. I knew how to beat him. I knew how to box him. I studied him well, even used his sparring partners," Botha said, recalling the run-up to the biggest night of his career with a whimsical tone in his voice. "He asked me to spar with him once because I was messing them up. I said, 'Mike, are you crazy? Once you spar me, you will never fight me.'"

Botha started the first round by jabbing and moving, even landing a couple of straight rights. Whenever Tyson got close, Botha clinched, neutralizing any offense. That last bit almost caused proceedings to go violently pear-shaped. As Botha was holding toward the end of the first round, Tyson grabbed Botha's left arm and twisted the limb against the elbow, eliciting a groan of protest from the South African. The bell went, and with referee Richard Steele unable to separate them, Botha proceeded to smash Tyson with his free right. The street fight was on, with security and cornermen rushing into the ring to pull them apart. "If I wasn't 'The Buffalo' and if I was a Peter McNeeley or someone like that, I could have just quit, said I was injured and got paid," recalls Botha. "But I was there to win."

Another arm twist by Tyson in the second round prompted a point deduction by Steele, after which things settled into a semblance of normality. Tyson's timing seemed off. He was walking in, missing wildly at times, while Botha stayed calm. Botha kept moving and jabbing, tossed in the occasional right and smothered any infighting. When Tyson briefly managed to back Botha to the ropes in the fourth, the South African walked him back and even started to clown a little bit once they got separated. He was clearly starting to feel it. And why not? He was executing his game plan and was ahead on all three cards entering the fifth.

It was looking good for him, but it was not to be. Botha was boxing in cruise control when he decided to jump in, throwing a right to the body. Tyson quickly stepped forward and landed a chopping right flush on the jaw. Botha went down, somehow made it to his feet, stumbled backward into the ropes and collapsed, as Tyson attempted to grab him in an embrace (along with Steele) to ease his fall. "I think I threw a lazy right and he just caught me. I started putting pressure on him too early. I should have just waited another round or so," laments Botha.

Just like that, it was over, with brutal finality at the 2:59 mark. How hard does Tyson hit? Botha does not mince words. "Power? He is the best by far. No one hits like Mike. Who else knocks people out like that? Maybe Lennox Lewis comes close, but that's it." A big compliment indeed from someone who fought a plethora of big-name heavyweights, including Lewis, Evander Holyfield, Shannon Briggs, Wladimir Klitschko and Joseph Parker.

It may not have been the same Tyson of the late '80s, but he was still the most dangerous heavyweight out there.

VINCENT LAFORET

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Mike Tyson is one of a kind, and that's true for his place in Japanese boxing history, too. Tyson is the only boxer to have headlined the Tokyo Dome, which represents the ultimate mega event and honor in Japan, and he did it twice: vs. Tony Tubbs in 1988 and James "Buster" Douglas in 1990. Nobody has come close to breaking the boxing attendance record of 51,600 that he set there 30 years ago. But Tyson does not need such decorations on his name.

In the spring of 1988, I was just a high school girl in Osaka and had never watched a boxing match. There was no internet to share fight clips and boxing information yet. But I knew who Mike Tyson was. I knew he spoke in an unexpected high-toned voice. A TV commercial for a new beer called Suntory Dry was airing at that time, and it featured a sweat-glistening Tyson digging into a heavy bag at full power. He gulped down a mouthful of beer and said, "Hi, I'm Mike Tyson. I like Suntory Dry!" before adding another fierce hook. That's it. Very simple and vivid. I didn't know anything about boxing, but his appearance itself showed destructive power.

Years later, while working for a sports publishing company in Tokyo, I was assigned to the editorial staff of Boxing Magazine. There was a pile of materials greeting me at the office on my first day: pictures, videos, stories and issues featuring Iron Mike on the cover. Going through it all, I could imagine what the "Tyson in Tokyo" experience was like.

On February 17, 1988, the youngest world heavyweight champion landed at Narita International Airport, more than a month prior to the March 21 fight day. Tyson's title defense against Tubbs was the first time Japan had hosted a world heavyweight championship since George Foreman vs. Jose Roman, held in 1973 at Nippon Budokan in Tokyo. Bringing in Tyson was a huge part of the celebration for the grand opening of the Tokyo Dome, nicknamed "The Big Egg," the nation's first ever indoor stadium. It was the fruit of the favorable business conditions brought on by the "bubble economy" that Japan enjoyed in the 1980s. Tyson vs. Tubbs was scheduled to happen between an exhibition baseball game between two eternal rivals, the Yomiuri Giants and the Hanshin Tigers, and a Mick Jagger concert.

While countless media and fans tried to catch Tyson upon his arrival, the fighter was focused on his preparation for Tubbs, repeating the words "I am here for the fight." Early next morning, he went for a shake-out run followed by a noon workout at Teiken Gym (which was to prepare him for the actual fight time). He listened to trainer Kevin Rooney, looked superb in sparring sessions and was faithful to the daily routine. Suntory was among the few companies that got a chance to have some quality time with the busy champion. They set up a boxing ring and a heavy water bag in their studio to shoot a short film on February 28 in Roppongi. It was reported that Tyson's workout routine with Rooney's timekeeping was just like that in the gym. That session helped produce a masterpiece of a TV commercial.

The fight, which almost sold out on the day the tickets were released, drew an unprecedented crowd of 51,000 to the brand-new venue. Muhammad Ali, Alexis Arguello, Sugar Ray Leonard and a bunch of Japanese celebrities, such as actor Toshiro Mifune, were ringside. Tubbs, a quick and clever boxer despite his flabby appearance, had his moments in the opening round, but Tyson destroyed the challenger's hopes with his lethal weapon – the right to the body-right uppercut combination – in the second round.

After the victory celebration in the hotel that night, Tyson asked a hotel clerk to send all the flowers and gifts

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from fans that filled his room to foster homes, as he would leave for New York the next morning.

Tyson's wheel of fate had already begun to turn in a bad direction when he arrived home from Tokyo to learn of the sudden death of one of his co-managers, Jim Jacobs. Between the Tubbs and Douglas fights in Japan, all of the disciples of the late Cus D'Amato would drop from Tyson's inner circle.

When the undisputed heavyweight champion returned to Tokyo on January 16, 1990, for the February 11 title defense against Douglas, Team Tyson looked totally different from that of two years ago. A picture shows Tyson wearing a gorgeous white fur coat followed by Don King clad in the same fashion. They landed at Narita Airport two hours late due to heavy snow. It was like a bad omen of what was going to happen with Tyson's second Japan tour. There was no Rooney to run him through endless drills, and he could not hide his poor condition in sparring sessions (in fact, he ended up getting knocked down by sparring partner Greg Page, who lost to Douglas in 1986). Then the fight day came.

It was the huge underdog Douglas, overcoming the loss of his beloved mother four weeks before and motivated by the chance of his lifetime, who surprised the new record-setting crowd of 51,600 spectators with a superb boxing exhibition, keeping Tyson away with stiff, long jabs from the beginning. Douglas' inspirational effort was almost overturned by a Tyson right uppercut, which dropped the challenger late in the eighth round. Unfortunately for Tyson, Douglas had the wherewithal to get up and survived the round with the help of a slow 10-count from the referee (later claimed to be an unfair "long count" by Don King). The bout that was supposed to end as early as the Tubbs fight made it into 10th round, where the soon-to-be-dethroned champion was caught by a Douglas right uppercut followed by a combination. The iron man hit the floor and spit out his mouthpiece.

Tyson's first loss was The Ring's Upset of the Year and is considered one of the legendary upsets in boxing history. But the image that remains with me is from the final seconds of the fight: Tyson scrambling on his hands and knees with shuttered eyes, somehow clutching the white mouthpiece with his gloves to put it back in his mouth on his own.

It was a fighter's instinct, and it's the purity of Mike Tyson that I remember.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

Although Mike Tyson never fought professionally in the Great White North, he did fight four adopted Canadians, including Conroy Nelson, Trevor Berbick, Donovan "Razor" Ruddock and Lennox Lewis. Lewis was born in England while the other three were born in Jamaica.

Conroy Nelson was Tyson's 13th fight as a professional, in November 1985, and he fell by the wayside just like many of Mike's early opponents. However, Nelson was one of the few to have even seen the second round. According to BoxRec.com, Nelson resided in Ottawa, Ontario, and competed mostly in Canada throughout his career. A quintessential journeyman, Nelson retired in 1998 with a record of 21-24-2, having lost to Berbick, Ruddock, Alex Stewart, Bert Cooper, Herbie Hide and Riddick Bowe.

When Tyson met Berbick on November 22, 1986, Mike was 27-0. Berbick had represented Jamaica at the 1976 Montreal Olympics and fought the majority of his first 19 pro fights in Halifax. Berbick had won the WBC title against Pinklon Thomas eight months prior, but his reign would fail to include a successful defense. Tyson unleashed plenty of his patented bombs, and Berbick couldn't withstand

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